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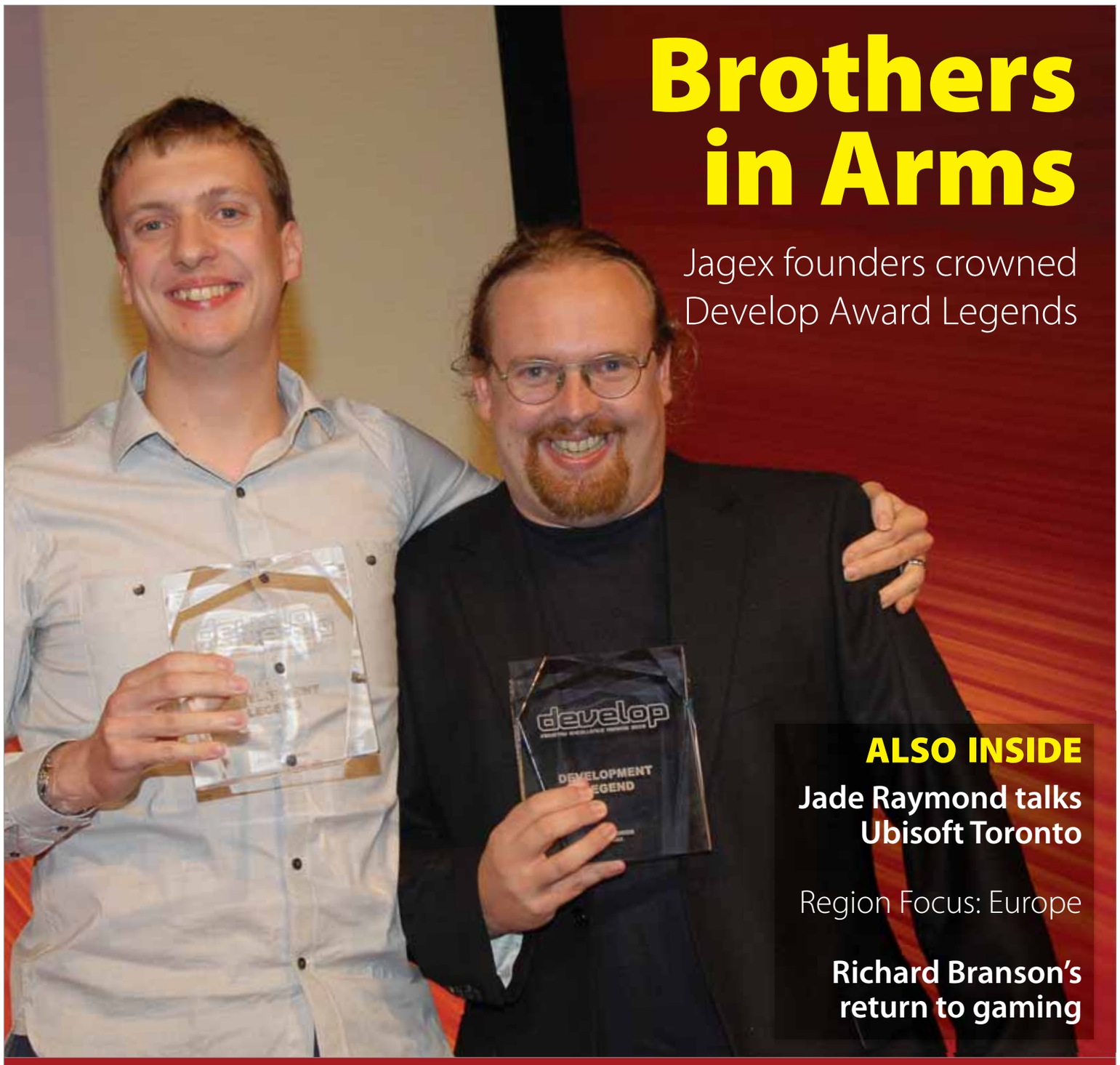

Brothers in Arms

Jagex founders crowned Develop Award Legends

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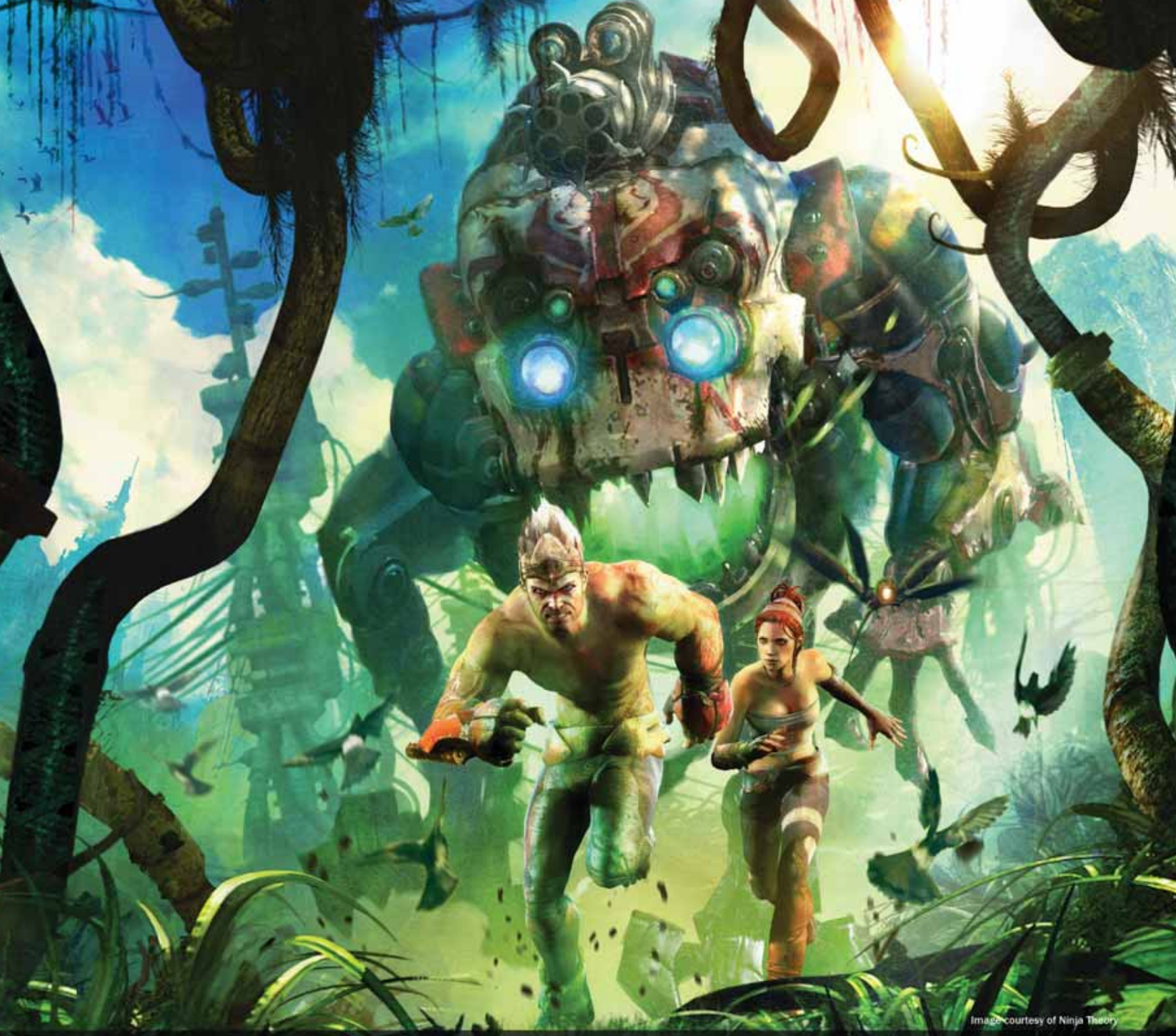

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www.naturalmotion.com

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develop
THE INTERNATIONAL MONTHLY FOR GAMES PROGRAMMERS, ARTISTS, MUSICIANS AND PRODUCERS

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ALPHA
ADVENTURES IN GAMES DEVELOPMENT: NEWS, VIEWS & MORE

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David Braben, p14

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Tiga on lobbying the government
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Flash devs get retail hotline

GameStop's swoop for Kongregate means indie developers and start-up studios can tap into retail traffic

by Michael French

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM says the games industry's evolution means that new developers are moving away from retail.

But global games giant GameStop wants to bridge the gap between indie development's new business models with the still-busy world of boxed products.

Last month, the firm made a surprise move and bought Flash games site Kongregate. The 20-man outfit will remain unaffected operationally – still allowing developers to upload their Flash creations and add them to a portfolio of games that use a social chat interface and achievements.

But Kongregate will help GameStop push forward from being 'just' a powerful retailer of physical games content.

And, the site's co-founder told *Develop*, it will also help introduce the 'core' audience of 500m global GameStop customers to its original, diverse and 30,000-game deep portfolio of titles.

"We've built a great audience, but it is nonetheless biased towards those who play a lot online," said Jim Greer, who founded Kongregate with his sister in 2007. "There is a group of people who are still getting their games offline and only just going online – I think we can now get ahead of the curve and reach those early adopters and late adopters."

Greer and the GameStop team reckon there is a huge crossover between the 'core' and 'casual' markets that are often seen as unconnected. Now they want to turn those hunting triple-A experiences onto the diverse free content available online as well.

GameStop doesn't see free content necessarily cannibalising the lucrative world of physical triple-A retail releases, either.

> ***"There are people who are still getting their games offline"***
> Jim Greer, Kongregate

"Retail continues to be an important focus of GameStop's business and is the core revenue driver," said digital ventures boss Chris Petrovic. "But we do see there are a lot of players that want to play games outside the living room. So we feel there is an opportunity to extend that relationship – we already speak to them when they are in stores so why not continue that when they are playing games across other devices or other arenas that aren't the living room."

Most important for small-scale developers is the potential to have their quirkier innovations promoted to the mainstream players that frequent GameStop's chain of highstreet stores.

Kongregate, with its 10m players, has already helped turn free and original games like the UK-made *Desktop Tower Defence* into popular titles online. With the backing of a major retailer, it can convert players to thinking about playing such experiences outside of the controlled, franchise-heavy and risk-averse retail shelves.

"GameStop reaches hundreds of millions – we'll be able to use the video displays in store and the retail outlets to show off great content. There's a real opportunity to say 'Hey you just bought *Civilization V*, why not also try this free real time strategy MMO that is on Kongregate – and here's a few dollars' worth of points for that game you can get started with'.

"It's about making the right recommendations to the players offline so they can make the right recommendations online."

www.kongregate.com

Editorial

Are you being served?

'Games as service.'

It's such an over-repeated games industry phrase that to type it out, let alone expect you to read it, feels like white noise seeping into the ether.

It's one of those things about the change in video games that we all know is true, but has become boring to hear. Yes, yes, we know – games are leaving strict single-player and multiplayer labels behind. We've heard many say it and few actually do it – enough already!

One of the *Develop* team overheard someone saying exactly that at last month's Develop Conference, but it's something ignored at your peril.

So let's try again, slower, to understand why this often repeated - but easily ignored - emergent force needs to be appreciated by everyone in it.

Games. As. Service.

Ah, maybe that's the problem; it sounds boring. Service – what an unexciting word to see on the same line as our precious 'games'.

Yet it isn't boring, because when games become a service, something beyond a fixed item sold in a box, the role of the developer fundamentally changes. The studio goes from being author to broadcaster.

While many of the day-to-day duties remain the same – content still needs to be made, updates issues, communities monitored – new abilities are needed to maintain audiences and keep them engaged.

Unfortunately for the biggest, most cutting edge games and online sites already doing this well, much of the hard work is required around the boring stuff; quality of online service, latency/lag, server management, and so on. It isn't about sexy stuff like rendering, poly-counts or things like iPad.

But developers must dig beyond wariness over jargon – after all, this is an industry packed with it – to see the potential emerging avenues for games will offer their business. We've profiled a number of such companies making the jump on this issue (nDreams – p37, Virgin – p41, We R – p58) and the firms out there supporting them (IGN for one – p68) to get you started on understanding exactly why this is beyond a buzzword, and more the shape of things to come.

Michael French
michael.french@intentmedia.co.uk

JAW's Odd deal

UK indie secures rights to revitalise the Oddworld series

by Will Freeman

THE UK GAMES industry is no stranger to curious business deals – but this one is decidedly Odd.

UK indie Just Add Water is at work on a number of titles that revisit the world of the critically acclaimed *Oddworld* series – originally made by a team in the USA.

Initially developed by Oddworld Inhabitants, the series began life on the original PlayStation in 1997, and rapidly established a cult following and a status as a champion of the 2D platforming genre.

JAW secured the rights to create the next *Oddworld* games after a conversation at GDC 2009 between the Leeds-based studio's MD Stewart Gilray and Oddworld creator and game design luminary Lorne Lanning.

Since, JAW has been at work on a number of *Oddworld* titles, which Gilray hints will make use of technologies established and forthcoming: "The current projects are at various stages of development and all use technology in different ways; some new and also some traditional technologies."

JAW has also secured access to many of those in the core team behind the original *Oddworld* games, including Oddworld Inhabitants co-founder Sherry McKenna.

> ***"The current projects are at various stages and all use technology in different ways."***
>
> Stewart Gilray, Just Add Water

"I've got direct access to Lorne, Sherry and Larry Shapiro, the CEO," Gilray confirmed. "To give you an idea of some of the processes, over the past couple of months well discuss something or show them something, then sometimes within minutes I'll get emails and so on, asking if we can apply that visual to other aspects etcetera."

To many, the news that a small UK studio is at work on an IP traditionally associated with US developers and fans may come as some surprise.

Currently JAW, which has described the pressure of handling such beloved IP as a positive influence, is keeping details of the projects close to its chest.

Right now, the key part of the deal is the unexpected meeting of minds between *Gravity Crash* developer JAW and Oddworld Inhabitants, which has created a close creative bond.

"As you can imagine Lorne and the guys are extremely busy people, so for me it's been amazing to get the kind of access we've had and in turn the conversations that have evolved. Lorne and I both have similar ideas about stuff, and we try to evolve those ideas together."

www.jawltd.com

‘Lobbying has put games on the map’

Games tax break is off the cards, but active work by the games sector in the UK has paid off and given developers deserved respect and attention says Tiga boss Wilson

THE UK GAMES industry isn’t getting a tax break – but that doesn’t necessarily mean its lobbying efforts were all for nought, according to Tiga.

In fact the active call for support and recognition has given developers an increased amount of respect, the organisation’s CEO Richard Wilson has said in a piece written for *Develop Online*.

Even though the long-running campaign had no measurable, fiscal outcome, the widespreadly call for government support “has put the industry on the political and media map,” Wilson wrote. “This was not an accident. It happened because the expression ‘give up’ isn’t in TIGA’s lexicon”.

Indeed: Tiga has already formed a steering group with publisher association ELSPA to see how they can work together on reigniting the tax break debate before authorities.

“Tiga’s relentless campaign for games tax relief has had the positive effect of raising the profile of the video games sector from a subterranean activity to the pinnacle of policy making,” Wilson said.

“Our industry is high on the agenda of politicians, policy makers and pundits. We have rammed the story of our industry so far down the throats of our politicians that they have had no choice but to sit up and take notice.

“When I took over as CEO of TIGA in 2008, the games industry was little covered in the national press as an economic or a business story and politicians where ignorant of the sector.”

www.tiga.org

> ***Our industry is high on the agenda of politicians, policy makers and pundits. We have rammed the story of our industry so far down the throats of our politicians that they have had no choice but to sit up and take notice.***
>
> Richard Wilson, Tiga

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Kick-off for Develop Challenge

Expectation is high for industry-only tournament

Online registration for the Develop Football Challenge has gone live.

The five-a-side tournament is expected to attract up to 32 teams from studios, outsourcers, service companies and the financial community.

Taking place on Friday October 8th at Power League, Barnet, the event will be given extensive media coverage throughout *Develop Online* and the monthly print edition.

"There is already a hugely successful summer football tournament run for the wider industry by Xbox and *MCV*, but there has long been demand for a developers' competition," said *Develop* publisher Stuart Dinsey.

"Unlike the Xbox event, which is free and partly invitation-based, the Develop Football Challenge is paid-entry. But we have tried hard to keep this affordable for studios and specialist companies of all sizes."

Entry fee is £495+VAT per squad of 10 players. All teams get to compete within high quality facilities inclusive of professional organisation, officials, trophies, lunch and refreshments.

As well as bragging rights, a trophy, medals and PR, the winner of this year's first ever Develop Football Challenge will gain free entry into the Top Corner Champions' Cup 2011 – which features top teams from a variety of industries.

"We know the appetite is huge for football events amongst studios and associated development firms, so we're expecting a big event," Dinsey added.

For more information or to enter a team contact Andy.Harding@topcorner.co.uk Sponsorship opportunities are available via Katie.Rawlings@intentmedia.co.uk

Services directory site is live

Sourcebook's prized compendium is now available online to everyone in the video games sector

Sourcebook, the annual directory of interactive entertainment industry service companies from Intent Media, now has an accompanying website expanding the priceless referencing services available from the brand.

The website covers every aspect of the video games industry; Creative & Promotional, Digital Distribution; Gaming Accessories, International Distribution, Legal Services, Localisation, QA & Testing, Manufacturing Services, Recruitment, Software Development and UK Distribution and Logistics.

Essential knowledge of companies from across the sector is readily available on the new site, alongside a digital version of the print edition which is available to download now.

The print copy of Sourcebook was published alongside last weeks' edition of *Develop* sister-mag *MCV*, and is also set to be distributed with selected reader codes of this mag, *Mobile Entertainment* and *PCR*. Print edition circulation is 20,000 copies.

"We launched Sourcebook almost ten years ago now, having recognised that there was a need for a dedicated directory of service and ancillary companies," said Intent Media managing editor Lisa Foster.

"In 2010 the Sourcebook has become the bibile for the European games industry, covering more sectors and companies than it ever has before. And our new website and digital edition means that even more people will be able to access the Sourcebook than before."

For more information, or to download a digital version of Sourcebook now, visit www.intentmedia.co.uk/sourcebook

DEVELOP DIARY

YOUR COMPLETE GAMES DEVELOPMENT EVENT CALENDAR FOR THE MONTHS AHEAD…

THE DEVELOP QUIZ

DEVELOP PUB QUIZ
September 29th
Sway Bar, London, England
www.develop-online.net

Taking place at the Sway Bar in London on Wednesday September 29th, the latest outing for this essential networking event will pit teams of five of industry boffins against each other.

All industry members – be they studios, publishers, QA, recruitment or localisation companies – are invited to attend, with a full (and fierce) night of entertainment and competition on offer.

Those interested in the September event should contact **Kathryn.Humphrey @intentmedia.co.uk** to book their place, as space is limited.

Exclusive sponsorship opportunities are also available. **www.develop-online.net**

AUGUST 2010

DARE PROTOPLAY
August 13th to 15th
Edinburgh, Scotland
www.daretobedigital.com

GDC EUROPE
August 16th to 18th
Cologne, Germany
www.gdceurope.com

GAMESCOM 2010
August 18th to 22nd
Cologne, Germany
www.gamescom-cologne.com

EDINBURGH INTERACTIVE
August 25th to 26th
Edinburgh, Scotland
www.edinburghinteractivefestival.com

CEDEC 2010
August 31st to September 2nd
Yokohama, Japan
http://cedec.cesa.or.jp/2010/en/

SEPTEMBER 2010

DIGITAL SPARK
September 1st to 2nd
Abertay, Scotland
www.digitalspark.abertay.ac.uk

FUTURE GAME ON
September 9th to 10th
Paris, France
www.futuregameon.com

TOKYO GAME SHOW
September 16th to 19th
Tokyo, Japan
http://tgs.cesa.or.jp/english

MCV PUB QUIZ
September 23rd
London, England
www.mcvuk.com

DEVELOP PUB QUIZ
September 29th
London, England
www.develop-online.net

OCTOBER 2010

EUROGAMER EXPO 2010
October 1st to 3rd
London, England
expo.eurogamer.net

LONDON GAMES FESTIVAL
October 1st to November 4th
London, England
www.londongamesfestival.co.uk

GDC ONLINE
October 5th to 8th
Austin, Texas
www.gdconline.com

DEVELOP FOOTBALL CHALLENGE
October 8th
Power League, England
www.develop-online.net

PCR FOOTBALL CHALLENGE
October 15th
Power League, England
www.pcr-online.biz

CASUAL CONNECT KYIV
October 21st to 23rd
Kyiv, Ukraine
kyiv.casualconnect.org

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WorldView

Our monthly digest of global games news…

DEALS

US-based game retail giant **GameStop** has acquired leading online Flash games portal **Kongregate**.

Swedish firm **Illuminate Labs** has been bought by middleware firm **Autodesk**.

Intel has been named as a key investor in cloud gaming service **Gaikai**.

Social game group **Arkadium** has licensed **Hansoft**'s project management and QA tech.

Twisted Pixel Games has licensed **RAD Games Tools**' animation toolkit for its new project *Comic Jumper*.

Emergent Game Technologies has signed a deal with **Aristen** that combines their FxStudio with the LightSpeed engine.

Trinigy has inked seven new Vision Engine licensing deals with Asian firms **Neowiz**, **Nano Play**, **SmileGate**, **Aurogon Games**, **Nsid Globaland FPTOnline**.

Sony Online Entertainment has signed **Romino Games**' side-scrolling action RPG *Swords & Soldiers*.

Disney has acquired US-based *Tap Tap Revenge* developer **Tapulous**.

CODIES SIGNS MORPHEME DEAL

NaturalMotion, the design tools provider that span out from its humble roots at Oxford University, has arrived at what is possibly the firm's biggest contract yet – a long-term deal with UK stronghold Codemasters.

The agreement between both parties begins with *Bodycount*, the latest FPS project underway at Codemasters Studios Guildford under the guidance of Stuart Black. NaturalMotion is providing its Morpheme animation engine to the studio, though the wider agreement will see Morpheme licensed out to a number of other Codemasters projects.

Codemasters CTO Bryan Marshall said that the Morpheme engine "integrates perfectly" with the studio's famed EGO Game Technology Platform.

"The Morpheme engine and tools enable fast and compelling content creation, driving Bodycount's explosive animations to new heights," He added.

www.codemasters.co.uk

UK

IAN LIVINGSTONE TO LEAD INDUSTRY SKILLS REVIEW

Ian Livingstone has been appointed as the government's skills champion for the video game sector.

Livingstone, life president of Eidos and chairman of the Skillset Computer Games Skills Council, is now tasked with driving both the video games and visual effects industry workforce to increase skills across the board.

The appointment is also setting the scene for Livingstone to begin work with Revolution Software's Charles Cecil and Double Negative's Alex Hope in launching a thorough review of education and training in the UK games and VFX industries.

The review is set to be carried out by NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) and Skillset. It was announced by Culture Minister Ed Vaizey at the Develop Conference 2010 in Brighton.

"This announcement is a fantastic recognition of all of the brilliant work Ian has done for the UK's games sector. We could not imagine a better qualified person for this role," said Skillset chief executive Dinah Caine.

"Skillset is very pleased to be given the opportunity to contribute to this review, which comes at an important time for our sector. We look forward to working with NESTA and with e-skills-UK as we continue our partnership work championing skills development in this sector."

www.skillset.org

USA

TAX BREAK JOY FOR NORTH CAROLINA STUDIOS

Next year the US State of North Carolina will grant its game studios a 15 per cent tax break – a measure which will bring a key competitive advantage to local firms such as Epic Games, FunCom and Red Storm.

The tax break relief will also apply to local companies building game platforms – doubling the delight of *Gears of War* and Unreal Engine creators Epic Games.

www.ncgov.com

UK

ZATTIKKA RAISES $5.5M IN FUNDING

Online and mobile games firm Zattikka has raised $5.5 million in funding through its parent company Expedite 5.

Led by Notion Capital and a group of private individuals including Harald Ludwig, co-chair of Lionsgate Entertainment, the investment will bolster Zattikka's efforts with regard to recruitment, R&D and marketing.

The company also plans to further broaden its portfolio of browser and mobile games.

"Over the past two years the consumer appetite for online gaming has increased significantly with revenue already standing at over $2.25bn in 2008 and growing 20 per cent per annum. This much broader audience is being driven by females and premium gamers developing a passion for casual social gaming," said Tim Chaney, CEO, Zattikka.

"To successfully operate in such a competitive fast-growth industry we are focused on developing games that appeal to the different demographics of this wider audience. This round of funding led by Notion Capital means we can now push ahead with recruiting even more skilled people and put substantial investment behind product development and marketing," he added.

www.zattikka.com

CANADA

FEMALE RUN STUDIO OPENS IN CANADA

In what is said to be the first of its kind in the country, two game industry entrepreneurs have opened a female-owned and operated dev studio.

Experienced industry names Brenda Bailey Gershkovitch and Kirsten Forbes are the two execs spearheading the Vancouver-based Silicon Sisters Interactive.

The outfit is said to have a predominantly female workforce, including designer Brenda Brathwaite as a consultant. The group is building two titles – one for PC and another mobile platforms – but is also open to certain work-for-hire projects.

Despite making noise about being a studio rooted in sisterhood, Gershkovitch insists that the firm's design philosophy isn't one gripped by the X-chromosome.

"We're not interested in 'pinkifying' games," she says.

FOR THE LATEST NEWS...
HEAD TO WWW.DEVELOP-ONLINE.NET

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CAPCOM AND NAMCO IN DEVELOPMENT TEAM-UP

Capcom and Namco are collaborating on crossovers for their popular individual flagship fighting franchises.

Street Fighter vs. Tekken is in the works for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, developed by Capcom, and merges the two long-running franchises into one epic fighter.

Like *Street Fighter IV*, the game will feature 2D gameplay with stylised 3D character models, according to Capcom.

New gameplay modes including tag team will allow characters from the franchises to both work together and lock horns.

Game producer Yoshinori Ono and and Tekken series project leader Katsuhiro Harada announced the collaboration at the San Diego Comic-Con.

But the two publisher/developers will, like the characters in their franchises, be competing as well as collaborating: Namco is working on a second game, *Tekken vs. Street Fighter*, developed by its *Tekken* team, which puts all the characters in its gameworld (rather than vice-versa in *Street Fighter vs. Tekken*).

The likely winner of this one is too close to call.

www.capcom.com/www.namco.co.uk

"It's no coincidence that the games I and many other female gamers are most drawn to have had women involved in their development. Girls and women game differently than boys and men. Silicon Sisters has studied these differences so we can make games that truly appeal to and resonate with the female audience."

www.siliconsisters.ca

GERMANY

PERISCOPE STUDIO DEMOS 'INTERACTIVE AUDIO'

Interactive audio middleware specialist Periscope Studio has released a new premier video offering a first look at its Psai technology in action.

"We wanted to capture Psai's capabilities, its reaction times to different playing styles, its immersive qualities and above all, its simplicity and beauty," explains Finn. "In this case, we're showing off the 'Action' mode and our Lightsaber demonstration captures this perfectly. It's fun to watch.

"With Psai, players will be controlling – almost conducting – their own soundtrack," adds Finn.

"Every style of gameplay and genre is supported; from FPS's to racing games, RPG's to adventure, everything is covered. Psai simply means that each and every player will have a gameplay experience which is unique."

More will be revealed at Gamescom 2010.

www.periscopestudio.de

UK

NEW OFFICE FOR IGUANA ENTERTAINMENT

North East studio Iguana Entertainment has moved shop into a new Middlesbrough-based office.

"This new office provides a new creative environment for our team of developers, and inspiration as we continue our growth in the social gaming market," said MD Darren Falcus.

Iguana are currently working on a number of casual, online and boxed titles, with more details on all expected to follow shortly.

www.iguana-entertainment.com

UK

PACKED SPEAKER LIST FOR NEW ABERTAY EVENT

Big names from the UK game industry and the British government are all set to attend Digital Spark – a new Abertay University – hosted event offering advice on how studios can leverage and protect their intellectual property canon.

Already set to speak at the event is Fiona Hyslop, the Scottish minister for culture and external affairs, as well as Sony Computer Entertainment Europe's IP and tech director Hogarth Andall.

Also offering insight will be ELSPA director general Mike Rawlinson, and the senior vice president of Nokia, Louise Pentland.

The event is set to run from September 1st – 2nd in Abertay.

www.digitalspark.abertay.ac.uk

SAY WHAT?!

"[You worry about talking to] One guy? Who cares? That's a waste of time."

Mark Rein interrupts Cliff Harris' customer relations comments during an indie studios panel at the 2010 Develop Conference...

"Triple-A studio bosses trying to lecture me on how to communicate better with gamers? F off."***

Leading Harris of Positech to communicate his feelings about Rein of Epic Games' comments very clearly on his blog...

"Yeah, Mark can jump in with guns blazing sometimes, invited or not. It's all intended to be in good fun, but I guess it didn't work out that way this time. Sorry!"

Causing Epic CEO Tim Sweeney to wade into the growing fray and apologise on his workmate's behalf...

"It's not like some great injustice was being done and needed commentary from me. I was just being a jerk."

Before Rein delivered a master class in humility, apologising to Harris and drawing a line under the whole debacle.

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS SPONSORED BY DEEP SILVER

COMMENT: BUSINESS

What next for Government assistance?

by Rick Gibson, Games Investor Consulting

As tax credits float away from the UK studio sector, leaving a flotsam of good intentions, hard work, broken promises, and an oily slick of cynicism, what next for British games? As the source of most of the hard data on the current and future states of the UK games development sector, GIC has long been in the tricky position of balancing the strong potential for a bright future for UK studios with the downward indicators that result from the uneven global playing field. So where does the industry go from here? Here are three scenarios with possible responses, based on the Coalition Government spending a fair amount, a small amount and nothing at all.

Scenario 1 is the least likely: Government finds a modest pot of money for the games industry to use, say between £5m and £20m. The latter's roughly the amount unused in Film's tax credit allocation last year, and, before he got elected, the new Minister thought he might be able to raid it. This seems unlikely, but what could the industry do with that kind of money? Big measures like tax credits that benefit many studios are out because that level of budget is too small. That scale suits grant schemes, but they have patchy track records.

The French specialise in hand-outs providing temporary relief for wobbly companies and many supported companies collapse when funding stops. Slightly better are educational grants designed to link industry with universities, but few have yet delivered much of commercial value. More viable are specialist bodies disbursing matched grants (Government matches private funding), or low interest or convertible loans. These can be successful when the right product/studio is backed following vigorous tyre-kicking. Here, matched grants could deliver the most bang:buck ratio, and assist a modest number of studios with sub-£0.5m early-stage or prototype financing.

Scenario 2 is barely more likely: Some money, say £1m-£2m, is scraped together by combining various pots in different departments. This will take a fair degree of political will and capital, whose existence is currently unclear. The problem with this level of funding is that it's quickly spent, administrative costs can burn a significant proportion, and the remainder could disappear into low impact schemes such as trade show grants, generic organisational assistance or 'innovation grants'. This level would see few if any specific projects assisted and it is arguable whether any value would be created at all. Perhaps controversially, I'd suggest that the trade bodies would be better recipients for this level of funding than Government departments. Perhaps TIGA runs a prototype fund like Nordic Game or an indie game competition, or ELSPA teaches the new marketing or commercial skills desperately needed by new digital businesses. Whatever the programme, these organisations are better placed to deliver high-impact assistance than Government.

> ***"Gloomy statements from senior publisher execs on the unlikelihood of increasing their investment in Britain hint that further pain is to come."***

Scenario 3 is most likely: Nothing happens at all. Politicians continue to glad hand the industry, dodge the blows but, since the cupboard is bare, no assistance is forthcoming for the foreseeable future. In this scenario renewed calls for tax credits could fall repeatedly on unfertile ground. As someone who has worked on tax credits for over four years, I believe that boat has well and truly sailed. This scenario means organic growth or decline, depending on which games sub-sector you're in. Many console studios' headcount has gradually declined over several years, as publishers increase the size, but reduce the number of bets placed, usually on bankable IP. These studios will continue to win work for hire, but fewer contracts in 2009 could persist as publishers weather the falling console market until the next generation arrives. Gloomy statements from senior publisher execs on the unlikelihood of increasing their investment in Britain hint that further pain is to come for traditional studios. Sadly, we see no indicators strong enough to challenge the trend of slow decline for the 80 per cent of the UK's developers working in studios mostly or entirely financed by publishers.

This 'hair-shirted' Government has made it clear that tax credits are way off the agenda for the UK games industry

What about the remaining 20 per cent working self or privately funded studios? Almost all are in the online space and no regular reader will be surprised to hear us say that the online sub-sector's a healthier place to be. Most UK companies in this space are growing, some at a brisk pace, and our forecast for online is continued strong and sustainable growth.

That's a key word – sustainability – surely the most important criteria when Government asks where it should invest or how it should help. The bottom line is that many online studios we assess for investors have considerably higher profit margins from more predictable revenues than offline studios. Leaner online studios that service their own audiences and book consumer revenues are intrinsically more stable, able to raise finance and are ultimately more sustainable. Investors instinctively turn towards service businesses with predictable revenue flow in a growing market, as opposed to those hoping for a big hit in a flat or declining market. Any initiative requiring matched funding from VCs would naturally skew towards online businesses. The low levels of funding in the first of our two scenarios are largely inappropriate for traditional console titles anyway. So, I'd propose that helping British studios speed up their slow transition towards a more sustainable online future is arguably the best way to make count whatever meagre assistance can be cobbled together by this hair-shirted Government.

Rick Gibson is a director at Games Investor Consulting, providing research, strategy consulting and corporate finance services to the games, media and finance industries.
www.gamesinvestor.com

COMMENT: DESIGN

Great Expectations

by Billy Thomson, Ruffian Games

Over the past month or so we've been closely following as many gaming websites and forums as we could. We've also been checking thousands of tweets and Facebook updates looking for any press preview write-ups and any early indications of the public response to the *Crackdown 2* demo.

From what we could find the response was predominantly positive; most people were playing the game with their friends online and they seemed to be having a lot of fun. We were pleased with the general response; things were looking promising. While we were pleased to hear that the demo had been going down well, we still had to wait on the final game going out to the press for their final reviews. This is one of the most nervous times of all for a game developer.

PREPARING FOR LAUNCH

We had spent the past month or so travelling around the world to all of the press events that had been set up, showing the game off to the world's media in Europe, as well as America and Canada. During the demonstrations the press seemed to be having a great time with the game, so we were quietly confident that we would get decent review scores.

> ***"Most reviewers enjoyed the game, but admittedly some didn't take to it quite so well. It seems that we've created the gaming equivalent of Marmite with Crackdown 2."***

The thing is, you've spent so much time and effort pouring your heart and soul into the creation of the game that any negative feedback can feel like a hefty kick in the nuts. So, we were all nervously waiting to see if we would get more pats on the back than bruises to the nether regions. Over the course of the past few weeks the reviews have been pouring in and we've been getting some really good reviews. Most of the reviewers really enjoyed the game, but admittedly there are a few that didn't take to it quite so well. It seems that we've created the gaming equivalent of Marmite with *Crackdown 2*.

It's a nerve-wracking time for all when your game arrives in-store. But it's also a great feeling

The most anxious, nail-biting time of all for a game developer is when the game finally goes on sale and we get the ultimate reaction from the public – do they decide to spend their hard-earned cash on the game or do they ignore it and buy something else? Strangely enough a game can get incredibly high review scores and still not sell as many as you would expect.

In the past few years there have been a few very good games that have been extremely well received by the gaming press but somehow failed to make their mark at retail. Whether this was due to a lack of sustained marketing or simply a lack of appetite for the particular genre remains to be seen.

READY FOR RETAIL

Finally, it was our turn to run the retail gauntlet. As I said, the demo has been out for a few weeks and is doing amazing download numbers which is great, but at the end of the day it's all about how the full game does.

We genuinely do make games for love of creating them – we're honestly all games players at heart – but the cold hard truth is that we still need to make sure that the publisher covers its costs and hopefully makes some profit from the venture, otherwise they won't want to continue working with us. And then we're all out of a job...

Despite any negative comments that your game may get, they all sweep away for a short time when you first see your game on the shelves in the local game store. I was lucky enough to walk into both GAME and Gamestation in Dundee on the UK release day and see *Crackdown 2* sitting in the number one slot, which was a truly fantastic sight. Seeing your game at number one is an unbelievably powerful feeling, but I did quickly bring myself back down to earth by reminding myself that this was likely just the staff at the store putting the latest big game release up in the top slot.

At the time of writing this – which is admittedly still very early days – it seems that *Crackdown 2* is doing quite well and is currently sitting at the top of the UK All Formats Top 40 Chart.

Hopefully it stays up there for a wee while. But even if it doesn't manage to hold on to the top spot for as long as we would all like, we'll still be proud of the game that we all made.

Billy Thomson is the creative director of newly-formed developer Ruffian Games. Billy has over 13 years experience of designing video games, including design roles on *Grand Theft Auto* and *GTA2*, before working as lead designer on Realtime Worlds' celebrated *Crackdown*.
www.ruffiangames.com

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS SPONSORED BY DEEP SILVER

COMMENT: INDUSTRY

When are new things good for games?

by David Braben

The above question is not such a stupid one, especially now, as collectively our industry, or at least some parts of it, seem very poor at judging this. There is a part of our industry – perhaps a bigger part than many of us will acknowledge – that is conservative through and through. Any change is automatically bad, unless it is just an improvement on what we already had before, like more polygons, or more buttons on a controller. I can almost hear the rumbles of disagreement, of people discounting themselves mentally from this group. But to some extent it probably applies to all of us.

There are so many clear examples. The Wii. Analogue controls on joypads. The mouse. The DS. Giant custom controllers like with *Guitar Hero*. All the way back to something like *Elite* – which publishers didn't want, except the newcomer Acorn, which was perhaps too 'inexperienced' so saw change as a very good thing. I'm glad they did.

I didn't think a $100 giant plastic guitar-controller that only worked with one game would fly commercially, but it did. I loved the Wii (but still hate the name), but I too was scornful at how under-powered the DS was. We are not always wrong (Virtual Boy, for example – and I don't mean Milo), and do occasionally embrace the wrong thing, as I think we are currently in danger of doing with 3D. Don't get me wrong, 3D will come, and will be successful, as I think it will be now on the 3DS. But it needs glasses-free technology to be truly mass market, which is still a year or so away for large TVs. And even then it needs a leap in graphical performance to do full justice to it. So it will probably only shine across the board on a future hardware generation.

Where we have got it so wrong is where the people who end up buying the devices, games, whatever, are not well represented within the industry. The move from keyboard-and-mouse to controller was the first obvious example of this. This was our industry's first step towards the living room and the move to dedicated games devices. But many were reluctant to take it as, for them, it changed the experience, and perhaps made it less intense for some types of games. Nevertheless, with hindsight it was the right thing to have done, as without it our industry would have stagnated, and remained in its ghetto. The transition to the Wii was similar.

Microsoft's Kinect, along with Move and 3DS, is a potential game-changer

> ***"There is a part of our industry – perhaps a bigger part than many of us acknowledge – that is conservative through and through. They think any change is bad."***

This year, we are spoiled for choice for new technologies, but there is a worrying undercurrent (again) of nay-sayers in some parts of the industry. Kinect, Move, 3DS are all potential major game-changers, enabling great new ways of playing games we have not seen before. The major hardware manufacturers have stuck their financial necks out to make these possible, and we should embrace them as best we can.

MAKING A KINECTION

At Frontier we are lucky enough to have been working with Microsoft's Kinect for a long time now, and as always with new hardware, it has been both a challenging and rewarding experience. I am very proud of what we are doing with the *Kinectimals* game, but I can also see great opportunities to use the technology in the future in different ways, for games that people would consider 'core' as well as in broad titles like *Kinectimals*. The whole sitting/standing argument is a case in point. A great new feature of Kinect is you can determine the position of the player's legs – making genuine dance and yoga games possible. So many of the activities in the launch titles use that feature because it is new. I suspect future 'core' games will still be made to appeal to the sedentary, potentially using a controller too. But that is the point – it is up to us in development.

Look at *Avatar* – the best-selling film of all time - the bastard child of the violence of *Terminator* and the arthouse beauty of *Princess Mononoké*. Many in the film industry privately hate its success, perhaps because James Cameron seems to have made enemies in Hollywood, and possibly out of jealousy – especially as it was widely touted as likely to fail catastrophically by those same people who denied it funding. But it succeeded nevertheless, and those people were forced to eat their words. Sadly, complex, emotionally tangled, beautiful 'art house' film creations generally review well, but sell very little, as they only appeal to the narrow 'core' within the film industry and people who follow the industry very closely.

It is a lesson for us too. Let's not go that route. Let's also appeal to the broad audience as an industry and so keep out of the ghetto. Let's embrace the new, and make it what we want it to be.

David Braben is the founder of Cambridge-based Frontier Developments. Best known as the co-creator of *Elite*, Braben has contributed to, designed or overseen a number of other projects including *Frontier: Elite II*, *Dog's Life*, *Thrillville* and *LostWinds*. Frontier is currently developing his next title, *The Outsider*. He is also closely involved with Skillset.
www.frontier.co.uk

COMMENT: OPINION

User-Generated Content on Xbox Live

by Ben Board, Microsoft

If you were asked to identify the single most significant advance in console gaming in the last ten years, the defining paradigm shift, what would it be? There are certainly a number of candidates, but I reckon the winner is when games went online. The benefits of this single advance barely needs elaborating, from features such as multiplayer gaming, leaderboards, voice chat and messaging, together with new business opportunities such as Xbox Live Arcade and Indie Games, Games on Demand, demo and video downloads, and DLC.

Add to that list another in-game feature, in the ascendancy of late: user-generated content. Developers are realising that by providing players with a way to build levels, paint characters, customise cars, share replays, or send images, they are likely to better keep their interest – and postpone the trade-in. The same applies to the audience who will peruse that library of user content even if they don't contribute to it. Keeping your audience engaged is one step towards building your brand.

APPROACHING UGC

So we're always happy to hear when a title is including UGC features. Now, it doesn't take great insight to understand that within the wide, rolling fields of user creations lurk a few landmines. Some UGC tools, particularly flexible ones such as *Forza Motorsport*'s awesome car customisation, provide such powerful routes to self-expression that some of the more... excitable examples are likely to prompt the audience to express themselves with equal vigour; notably in alarm, wrath, or with robust legal action.

Frequenting the flesh-coloured palette in *Forza*'s bodyshop is just the most obvious way to cause trouble, but your PR or legal departments are going to get sweaty if players are able to breach copyright, child protection or privacy laws with their creations; and if you didn't protect against malicious users' intent to subvert platform security, things would get really crispy.

But the fact is all these risks can be mitigated, and your DAM will work with you at concept submission stage to discuss the risks and agree on steps to meet them. Today I'll briefly sketch this process.

First up: how do you know if your game feature is even a UGC tool? Well, could your QA team feasibly test every one of its conceivable end products? If not, it is.

When we look at your design we first gauge the risk, and then establish some mitigation steps.

At the basic level, risks increase as you share more widely and store content in more locations. Your Xbox Live Friends are considered to be an audience you can trust – within reason, recognising that your capital-F Friends on Live aren't necessarily real-life buddies. In the simplest UGC design you restrict visibility of your shared creations to your XBL Friends, and never store the creations anywhere, even locally. Sharing something inappropriate with a Friend can be resolved with a personal "Dude, pack it in!". Worst case, they de-Friend you. That's often sufficient for Friend-only sharing. Broadening the audience raises the need for a mechanism for UGC consumers to report creators acting irresponsibly. As the provider, you'll need to respond to those complaints: offenders could be blacklisted from sharing, from using your title online at all, or, in the most serious cases that would require escalation to us, banned from Live altogether.

> ***"Developers realise that by providing players with a way to build levels, paint characters, customise cars, they are likely to better keep their interest – and prevent the trade-in."***

CONTAINMENT

So, to storage. If you want to save a local copy – and let's face it, you probably do – that's great, but it's then possible for a determined person to interfere with it before it's next loaded, and you'll need to anticipate and deal with that. Perhaps you want to allow remote players to save your content locally? This is where things start getting interesting. For a start, you'll need XLSP to store and share the packages. You'll need to provide reporting mechanisms for bad content as well as its creators, and remove it (and perhaps them) from your service. You should strong-sign content packages, and, if the loaded UGC makes use of any disc-based assets, validate that those assets haven't been meddled with.

Forza Motorsport boasts impressive car customisation options…

The risk graph takes a sharp upward turn if you allow players to download, edit, and re-share content. You will need to track how content packages are derived from one another and prepare to pull all packages built on a stem later found to be complaint-worthy.

Finally, you may be planning a service where people create content outside the Xbox and enable it to be brought into Live, and shared. If so, you just pressed the big button marked 'Take Me to Scarytown'. Clear the calendar, boil the kettle, fire up the lawyers, and give us a call – you're about to get busy.

Whatever UGC feature set you choose, there are a few standard steps you will need to follow. TCR 61 mandates that you observe the content-sharing privilege bits the player (or their mum) might have set on their account. TCR 64 indicates that user-generated content can't be stored on Live storage; and to comply with TCR 92 you'll need to run any player-created string through the filter of XStringVerify() before it can be shared. You should also keep your legal people in the loop as your plans develop, particularly if you're working on a high-risk flesh-coloured strategy. Lastly, today we don't support the sale of UGC, nor the sharing of executable code or scripts.

Whatever your UGC thoughts, though, you should maintain a dialogue with your DAM from the off. He can advise on risks and mitigations, opportunities and potholes, and ultimately will be the person to sign off on your plan and help your title reach concept approval.

Ben Board is European developer account manager at Microsoft, supporting all studios working on games for Xbox and Games For Windows platforms. He previously worked as a programmer and producer at the likes of Bullfrog, EA and Lionhead.

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BETA

DEVELOPMENT FEATURES, INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS & MORE

Black Rock Studio opens its doors for Disney's Aim High campaign, p33

Europe's defining tech firms and studios

p27

What Virgin's comeback means to developers

p41

Jade Raymond talks Ubisoft Toronto

p55

A United Front

Two gongs for Unity at this year's Develop Industry Excellence Awards - turn over for a full breakdown of the winners, p18 - 26

And the Winners are...

Last month **Develop** brought together the sector's leading lights for our yearly Industry Excellence Awards. Here we bring you a round up of all the winners…

GRAND PRIX
Unity Technologies

"This is a such a crazy, big honour. We're such a young company and in many ways newcomers to the games industry, so to be selected as the first pure technology for the Grand Prix is just immense. Phil Harrison's kind introduction to us focused on how we have 'transformed how games are made, distributed and played', and really hit the spot – that exactly describes what we set out to do."

David Helgason, Unity Technologies

Host and comedian Rufus Hound (above) and guests enjoying the revelry (right)

DEVELOPMENT LEGEND
Andrew and Paul Gower, Jagex

"Looking at the list of people who've won this award over the years – I feel honoured to be listed amongst them. Sometimes I think of the early days of RuneScape development. Back then it was pretty much a hobby with hopes of maybe being able to earn myself a living from it. It blows my mind how far things have come."

Paul Gower, Jagex

THE JUDGES 66 people voted on this year's awards and Develop is very grateful for all their support. They are:

Jason Bates (Red Lynx), **Ian Baverstock** (Tenshi), **Tony Beckwith** (Black Rock Studio), **Ian Bell** (Slightly Mad Studios), **Ben Board** (Xbox), **James Brooksby** (Doublesix), **Terry Cavanagh** (Distractionware), **Charles Cecil** (Revolution Software), **John Chasey** (FinBlade/Metismo), **Gavin Cheshire** (Codemasters), **David Coghlan** (Havok), **Kieran Connell** (Microsoft), **Rob Crossley** (Develop), **Ivan Davies** (Catalyst Outsourcing), **Ed Daly** (Zoe Mode), **Stuart Dinsey** (Intent Media), **Gary Dunn** (Sega), **Andrew Eades** (Relentless), **Hugh Edwards** (High Score), **Harvey Elliot** (EA Play), **Mark Estdale** (Outsource Media UK), **Paul Farley** (Tag Games), **Guillaume de Fondaumiere** (Quantic Dream), **Will Freeman** (Develop), **Michael French** (Develop), **Simon Gardner** (Climax Group), **Caspar Gray** (Square Enix), **Mark Healey** (Media Molecule), **Nils-Holger Henning** (Bigpoint), **Sefton Hill** (Rocksteady Games), **Karl Hilton** (Crytek UK), **Martin Hollis** (Zoonami), **Adrian Hon** (Six to Start), **Brendan Iribe** (Scaleform), **Miles Jacobson** (Sports Interactive), **Richard Jacques** (Richard Jacques Studio), **Darren Jobling** (Eutechnyx), **Daniel Jones** (Binary Tweed), **John Kearney** (VooFooStudios), **Richard Keen** (IGN), **John Klepper** (Imagination Studios), **Chris Lee** (FreeStyleGames), **Ian Livingstone** (Square Enix), **Colin Macdonald** (Realtime Worlds), **David Mollerstedt** (EA DICE), **Mike Montgomery** (Lightning Fish Games), **Mick Morris** (Audiomotion), **Daniel Neve** (Mere Mortals), **Patrick O'Luanaigh** (nDreams), **Patric Palm** (Hansoft), **Ben Parfitt** (MCV), **Jason Perkins** (Curve Studios), **Liz Prince** (Amiqus), **David Ream** (Hello Games), **Torsten Reil** (NaturalMotion), **Stuart Richardson** (Develop), **Andy Robson** (Testology), **Martin de Ronde** (OneBigGame), **Tim Rogers** (Eurocom), **Keith Russell** (Babel Media), **Hayden Scott-Baron** (Starfruit), **James Shepherd** (SCE Cambridge), **Jonathan Smith** (Traveller's Tales), **Samuli Syvähuoko** (Recoil Games), **Alice Taylor** (Channel 4), **Sebastian Wloch** (Asobo Studio)

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CREATIVITY

BEST NEW IP | **BEST USE OF A LICENCE OR IP** | BEST NEW DOWNLOAD IP | **VISUAL ARTS** | PUBLISHING HERO | **AUDIO ACCOMPLISHMENT**

BEST NEW IP

Heavy Rain (Quantic Dream)

"We are really honoured by this award. I would like to thank everyone who voted for us in the industry and all the gamers who gave Heavy Rain a chance."

David Cage, Quantic Dream

BEST USE OF A LICENCE OR IP

Batman: Arkham Asylum (Rocksteady Studios)

"This is fantastic. We'd like to thank Eidos and Warner Bros for believing in us, the team for all their hard work, and everyone who purchased Arkham Asylum."

Sefton Hill, Rocksteady Studios

BEST NEW DOWNLOAD IP

Angry Birds (Rovio)

"Getting an award is one of the greatest compliments any studio can have. We would like to thank Develop and everybody that voted for Angry Birds."

Matthew Wilson, Rovio

VISUAL ARTS

Split/Second (Black Rock Studio)

"We're thrilled that Split/Second received the recognition for Visual Arts. It's a huge honour and a very proud moment for everyone at Black Rock."

Paul Ayliffe, Black Rock Studio

PUBLISHING HERO

Channel 4

"I'm astounded and completely delighted to receive this on behalf of C4 and, of course, all of the indies whose work we publish. Thank you Develop."

Alice Taylor, Channel 4

AUDIO ACCOMPLISHMENT

DJ Hero (FreeStyleGames)

"Everyone at FreeStyleGames is delighted that we won this award. We have been overwhelmed by the reaction to DJ Hero from both gamers and press."

Dan Neil, FreeStyleGames

TIME TO GET LEAN

KANBAN - AGILE - COLLABORATIVE SCHEDULING - BUG TRACKING

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WINNER '10

TECHNOLOGY & SERVICES

TECHNICAL INNOVATION | **TOOLS PROVIDER** | ENGINE | **SERVICES** | CREATIVE OUTSOURCING | **VISUAL OUTSOURCER** | RECRUITMENT COMPANY

TECHNICAL INNOVATION
Unity Engine (Unity Technologies)

"We're so honoured to receive this fantastic award. This comes before our launch of Unity 3 – our biggest update – which will take Unity to new places."

David Helgason, Unity Technologies

TOOLS PROVIDER
Hansoft

"We have launched two strong releases this spring, and being recognised by our industry peers feels truly amazing for all of us."

Patric Palm, Hansoft

ENGINE
Unreal Engine 3

"We couldn't be more excited about Unreal Engine 3's third consecutive Develop Industry Excellence Award and what it means to Epic and the industry."

Mark Rein, Epic Games

SERVICES
Testology (Epic Games)

"Winning Best Services at the Develop Awards 2010 is an amazing achievement for Testology. Without our extraordinary clients we wouldn't be here."

Andy Robson, Testology

AUDIO OUTSOURCER
Side

"The team at Side are honoured and delighted to have won the Audio Outsourcer award this year. A win for Side is great positive feedback."

Andy Emery, Side

VISUAL OUTSOURCER
Axis Animation

"We're delighted to win at the Develop Awards 2010. To know that guys we work with think we have had a great year is a real seal of approval."

Richard Scott, Axis Animation

RECRUITMENT COMPANY
Amiqus

"We're absolutely delighted to have won this Develop Award for the second year running. We have exciting times ahead of us at Amiqus."

Liz Prince, Amiqus

STUDIOS

BEST NEW STUDIO | MICRO STUDIO | **HANDHELD STUDIO** | BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT | **IN-HOUSE STUDIO** | INDEPENDENT DEVELOPER

BEST NEW STUDIO
Hello Games

"As a studio of four, we are frankly stunned to be recognised as Best New Studio. From our photos, we could have won an award for most excited idiots."

Sean Murray, Hello Games

MICRO STUDIO
Hello Games

"This is a new award, and one where we feel a great camaraderie with the other nominees. The category is testimony to the rise of the small indie studio."

Sean Murray, Hello Games

HANDHELD STUDIO
SCEE Cambridge

"Like a game development Mickey Rourke we've been on the comeback trail, so to be recognised on a studio level means the world to everyone here."

James Shepherd, SCE Cambridge Studio

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
Sony XDev

"It's hugely rewarding to win an award for investing in new ideas and business within the games industry. A massive thank you from the whole XDev team."

John Rostron, XDev Studio Europe

IN-HOUSE STUDIO
Rocksteady Studios

"We are very honoured to be recognised by our industry peers in this way and the coveted trophy will be prized."

Jamie Walker, Rocksteady Studios

INDEPENDENT STUDIO
Quantic Dream

"We feel humbled by the honour of winning two Develop Awards this year. These represent a very special recompense for all the hard work."

Guillaume de Fondaumière, Quantic Dream

"Winners of the Develop Industry Excellence Award for Creative Outsourcing in 2009 & 2010"

develop INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE AWARDS WINNER '09

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EuroVision

Culturally diverse, creatively independent and financially stable, Europe is a worthy rival to both Asia and the US. **Will Freeman** talks to the studios and tech firms making the continent shine…

So vast and varied is Europe's culture, geography and populace, that it's not an obvious contender for a simple definition as a games development industry region.

However, with an increasingly dominant common currency, and the significant power of bodies like the EU on the international stage, as a destination connecting the companies, services and technology behind making games, Europe is clearly as much a hub for development as Asia or the US.

For companies like Ubisoft and Crytek that have thrived by spreading themselves throughout Europe's many countries, the continent clearly courts a certain quality that makes it a distinct home for ambitious developers and tech firms.

"All over Europe there are numerous pockets of highly talented people capable of making quality games," suggests Ubisoft's executive director of Worldwide Studios Christine Burgess-Quémard.

"Some of those pockets of talent are obvious because they have a concentration of gaming companies with a strong history of production – as is the case in several areas of the UK. Others are less visible because there are fewer companies present, but it doesn't make them any less capable of delivering great experiences."

According to Burgess-Quémard that's exactly the reason Ubisoft has always kept an open mind when it comes to establishing or acquiring studios in Europe. And it isn't only international giants of development and publishing that are singing the praises of Europe, as Vision Engine creator Trinigy reveals.

"Running a company in mainland Europe provides a lot of advantages," confirms the tech firm's general manager Felix Roeken, adding: "It has a great infrastructure and a history of technological innovation, cultural similarities and a uniform currency. All of these things are of great benefit to us."

SMART MONEY

One of Europe's distinguishing features as a continent is of course the Euro, which still serves as the world's second largest reserve currency, after the US dollar.

"To have a common currency in most of the European countries was the best thing ever," explains Dr. Andreas Gerber, group CEO of German AI specialist Xaitment. "Maybe not for the individuals, but for a company it brings a lot more stability and if you ship products to countries out of the Euro zone you have to deal with fast changing exchange rates."

> ***"Running a company in mainland Europe provides a lot of advantages. It has a great infrastructure and a history of technological innovation."***
>
> Felix Roeken, Trinigy

"Having the Euro as a single currency is a fantastic foundation for the games industry in Europe," agrees Roeken. "It not only eases our day-to-day business operations, it also helps facilitate global business. For example, many of Trinigy's Asian customers trust the Euro. As a result, we see many of our transactions happening in Euro instead of the US Dollar or local currencies."

Additionally, as Philip Belhassen, CEO of French app middleware specialist StoneTrip confirms, the Euro also makes it easier for smaller companies to manage as they don't have to think about currency changes.

"Europe is the second largest market for the video game industry so the Euro has a very important position," says Belhassen. "And a complete production chain based in Euros grants good stability for business."

The Euro zone offers a lot more than a common currency of course, predominantly in the form of the European Union, which is a benefit to almost every citizen in the continent, regardless of their familiarity with the Euro.

While huge bureaucratic governmental bodies tend to be large and slower moving than individual country's trade organisations, which can fell contrary to the fast-paced games industry, the EU isn't beyond turning its attention to development.

"Particularly recently, the EU has offered many very good programs to support research and to bring these results into the market," says Gerber. "This is, I would say, not nearly as much as the EU could be doing, but the situation is getting much better. If we look to what other countries did in the past, and what China plans to do in the near future, it becomes more and more important that all games companies in the EU strengthen their own IP and work closely together, so that we do not miss an extreme, fast growing high-tech market again like we have in the past."

All that considered, across the EU what Burgess-Quémard calls the 'European touch' has proliferated, and continues to be highly sought out by leading industry players across all continents.

"Our increasing internationalisation has facilitated the emigration of European developers to other areas, so it has become more difficult to sense where particular titles are developed. But Europe is far from alone as a development stronghold," warns the Ubisoft senior figure.

However, that European touch does mean Europe can rival the giant development hubs of the US and Asia.

"Compared to companies in the US and Asia, most European game developers see their products as a creative effort and will not compromise on quality or their creative vision," insists Daniel Klemesrud, business development manager at Swedish mo-cap and animation specialist Imagination Studios.

Above (top to bottom): Ubisoft's Christine Burgess-Quémard, Jagex's Mark Gerhard and Imagination Studios' Daniel Klemesrud

Right: Imagination Studio's recent tech demo in action

"It's not about releasing a sequel a year – as with so many games from the US and Asia that are on their version 10, 15 and so forth – but rather about providing gamers with intriguing and challenging experiences.

THE SPICE OF LIFE

Another benefit of being based in a continent with such a variety of cultures is that, for ambitious employers, the workforce can offer incredible diversity.

"The benefits to us are huge as you get a varied mix of talents and experiences from all over the world which makes for really rich products and untraditional thinking and perspectives which is desperately lacking in this space," proposes Jagex CEO Mark Gerhard, who heads up an impressively multicultural team.

"Cultural differences across Europe are still huge and that is where local knowledge and expertise really does help," continues Gerhard. "Really then, it's more down to the knowledge of how you present your content both in terms of localisation and culturalisation, than a requirement for a local office."

That cultural variety is not something exclusive to large scale development houses either, and across Europe, from teams like Dutch outfit and Killzone creator Guerrilla, through to tech companies who support the sector, there's a sense that Europe functions as a launch pad for products with an international presence.

"From our perspective Europe has a wealth of talent and a healthy mix of cultures that is unmatched by any other location," confirms Imagination Studio's Klemesrud. "Most European game developers have an international staff, and this reflects in the quality of the end product. European games tend to be more mature and creative."

What really marks Europe out, of course, is that the multiculturalism is built on common roots. The similarities in each nation's customs are as stark as their contrasts; something that many recognise as a perfect recipe for prolific creativity

"Too often we look to the other countries and tend to forget our strong and very exciting history that spans thousands of years," suggests Gerber. "The ability to be open to different cultures is a big plus for us – to come up with new outstanding ideas and technology. If we cooperate together in Europe, we can unleash much more creativity and business.

However, the benefits of multiculturalism bring with them their own set of challenges, as Belhassen is quick to highlight: "The difference in culture – mainly for support – is a very important factor that sometimes makes our localisation complicated, the challenge is always to provide solid relations with distant companies. But it is possible with the right management of priority."

There's other challenges too, not exclusive to Europe, but amplified my the complex mix of competing economies and governments.

"The biggest challenge is money," admits Gerber. "Especially in these markets, investors spend much more money on the ideas of good people. There is much more trust in the work of people. So the way I see it, there is five to ten times more money you can raise by also doing business in the USA and China.

Ultimately, the threat of loosing talent and cash flow to rival regions is a global reality that will ensure Europe remains commercially buoyant as a development sector.

As the likes of Imagination Studios, Ubisoft, Guerrilla Games, Xaitment, Trinigy, Stonetrip, Jagex and Crytek prove, developers and tech firms large and small can thrive in Europe, and, with a loosely synchronised effort, guarantee that the continent remains varied and inspiring as a landmass sandwiched between its rivals the US and Asia.

http://www.stonetrip.com

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XAITMENT

Speciality: AI middleware

Germany, China, US

Year Founded: 2004

Email: Via web

Web: www.xaitment.com

HEADQUARTERED IN Germany, Xaitment is the leading developer of AI solutions for the video game and simulation industries, and has established itself as one of Europe's most successful tech providers.

The firm has also managed to use Europe as a launch pad for a global presence, as Dr. Andreas Gerber, group CEO, explains: "Due to our fast economic growth in the last year, we are happy to have been able to build our second subsidiary in China, after we successfully established our first subsidiary in Los Angeles.

"Together with our sales and support partners all over the world, Xaitment targets all key markets in North America, Europe, Greater China, Korea and Japan."

Part of the reason behind such an impressive international reach is through harnessing the power of facilities such as German AI research centre DFKI, which, with other universities worldwide, Xaitment shares a very close relationship.

"This allows us to bring innovations to the video games market with our out-of-the-box products," confirms Gerber. "Our products cover the basic needs of hierarchical NavMesh and NavGraph generation and advanced pathfinding (xaitMap) in a dynamic environment, movement for single units as well as for complex formations and crowds (xaitMove) and modelling and debugging AI behaviours, scripting and gamelogic with a hierarchical probabilistic finite state machine (xaitControl), as well as high-level AI for building an ontology and managing the individual knowledge of bots (xaitKnow) and thinking, inferring and planning based on that knowledge (xaitThink), to implement an adaptive, self-aware and more intelligent behaviour."

Game AI is a complicated process, and when handled manually, requires painstaking and notoriously error prone hand coding. Today's tools may offer a degree relief to that manual process, but most provide little flexibility in terms of the solution itself. This is where Xaitment can help.

"Rather than forcing developers into a large, 'one-size-fits-all' package that is often difficult to integrate, Xaitment has developed an easy-to-use, modular system that enables studios to easily integrate only the AI features they need, and none they don't," says Gerber.

That means modules are easier to integrate into existing pipelines and less difficult to customise, offering a less risky, more flexible and far more cost-effective approach to game AI.

STONETRIP

Speciality: Engines

France

Year Founded: 2003

Email: Via web

Web: www.stonetrip.com

FRENCH TECH firm Stonetrip is primarily concerned with the design of and support for its ShiVa engine.

Based in two locations in France, and formed seven years ago, the company has attracted a diverse range of clients with a piece of technology conceived to cater for the easy creation of 3D real-time applications and games for Windows, Mac OS, Web, Linux, Wii, iPhone, iPad, Palm web OS and Android.

"The company is focused on delivering a powerful platform for creators through its industry leading technology that continues to make it easier to achieve high quality in less time with the greatest compatibility," explains CEO Philip Belhassen.

Stonetrip continues to add more platforms to the ShiVa platform as it extends its reach, leveraging its position in the heart of Europe.

"France is one of the top ten countries in the world for the video game industry and our location, in Sophia Antipolis, is really well placed for the networking," says Belhassen. "Nice is the second busiest airport in France, so the location is ideal for an international business. Even though Europe is an expensive place, there is a big interest in technological development and services, and this is exactly what we do."

France also offers Stonetrip and its contemporaries access to several organisations – including Ubifrance and France Sud – that helps the tech outfit to organise participation at different events such as GamesCom, providing a platform for courting the attention of a pan-continental and global audience; an opportunity Belhassen's firm has made full use of.

With 65 per cent of its customer base established in the US, and a further 20 per cent in mainland Europe excluding France, Stonetrip has proved the potential of its host continent to provide access to the wider industry.

"France accounts for just over 10 per cent, thanks to quite a large number of studios and also because of our French origin," confirms Belhassen.

"France has a really good general education and university program," adds a CEO clearly in love with his home nation. "There are good game schools – public and private – and this allows for high competency in recruitment, mainly from a technical point of view."

TRINIGY

Speciality: Engines

Germany, US

Year Founded: 2003

Email: sales@trinigy.net

Web: www.trinigy.net

ESTABLISHED IN 2003 to develop the Vision Engine, Trinigy started with humble beginnings and a hard working ethos that quickly paid off.

Over 150 projects now take advantage of the firm's core tech, which lets developers work across a range of platforms and game types. Catering for a diverse industry cross section including casual and traditional titles, digital distribution, MMO's and serious games, and a sweeping selection of genres, the Vision Engine is increasingly establishing itself as a leading European solution.

"We are a completely self-funded organisation, which enables us to listen closely to our customers in the development of our game engine, adapt quickly to market changes, and place a large amount of emphasis on customer support," affirms the company's general manager Felix Roeken.

Based in Eningen, Germany, Trinigy also has an office in Austin, Texas and growing representation across Asia.

"There has been an exciting boom of successful online browser game companies that have basically slingshot Germany into a globally leading market position within the last few years," says Roeken of Trinigy's location in Western Europe's heartland. "That trend has given us a slight advantage over other countries in mainland Europe, and with the recent launch of Vision Engine and our WebVision application for browser-based games, has really helped Trinigy as well."

Trinigy has met with great success operating globally, but mainland Europe remains a key markets for the Vision Engine. As a result, Roeken and his team have made a habit of building strong relationships across the continent over last seven years, and continue to welcome client input and feedback as a valuable resource.

"We had to learn some new lessons when we opened our office in the US about three years ago, especially in the areas of console games and marketing," admits Roeken. "Mainland Europe has traditionally focused on PC games, while the US and Japan are much more console-oriented. Looking back, that was a valuable step for us from a technological point of view as it factored considerably into the development of our game engine. We now have a multiplatform game engine that is far more flexible in terms of workflow, and far more optimised for performance across platforms."

CRYTEK

Speciality: Development and engines

Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, Korea, Ukraine, UK

Year Founded: 1999

Email: Via web

Web: www.crytek.com

WITH OFFICES in Frankfurt, Kiev, Nottingham, Sofia and Budapest, developer and tech firm Crytek is truly a prime case study of how a pan-European presence can establish a company as an international industry presence.

With a further facility in Seoul, Crytek, which is most famous for it CryEngine and the *Crysis* and *Far Cry* games, has not limited it's reach to the boundaries of Europe. Yet it remains one of the continent's most significant development and tech firms.

Established over ten years ago by the now famed Yerli Brothers, Crytek was conceived to be world class from day one, and remains so to this day. The CryEngine is so popular it has become a household name among gaming consumers, and it's presence on the back of game's boxes remains a key selling point.

Now in its third iteration, CryEngine offers developers of both PC and console titles one of the world's most flexible, highly organised genre-agnostic pieces of tech available today.

Promising plenty more is to come from CryEngine 3, Crytek has assembled a vast team from all over Europe and the rest of the world, and is in many ways defined by its multinational, multicultural workforce, who have created a n internal atmosphere near unrivalled for its variety.

Cryek began the process of offering what was conceived to be internal tech in 2002, when other developers began to contact the Yerli brothers' firm about licensing CryEngine. Quickly, positioned amidst Europe's developer-rich mainland countries, Crytek embraced licensing as a daily part of the business.

Crytek makes no secret of the fact that it considers CryEngine 3 next-generation ready, meaning that studios who work with the technology will be able to consider both current and future projects without need to worry about waiting for a new iteration.

CryEngine 3's multiplatform support is also so comprehensive claims the studio, that licensees won't need parallel teams working on each platform of a multiformat release.

Without doubt, Crytek is one of Europe's most ambitious, multitalented and popular organisations creating both critically acclaimed games and high-end technology.

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Perfect 10

After a decade in the business, Axis Animation has learned a thing or two about how to thrive in tough economic times. **Will Freeman** asks them what their secret is…

Above: Richard Scott, MD, executive producer and founder of Axis Animation

It's hard to believe that when Axis Animation began business at the dawn of the new millennium, the industry–spanning studio barely had a strategy for expansion in place.

With BAFTAs and Imagina Grand Dury Prize gongs now sitting in the Glasgow company's trophy cabinet, the last decade has clearly gone well for the studio, but at its inception things were markedly more humble.

"In our early years strategy wasn't something we discussed too much as everyone was knuckling down and doing a bit of everything," admits managing director, executive producer and founder Richard Scott, who formed Axis with three fellow artists and animators in his home town.

"As we've grown we've become much more strategic, you need to if you want to keep growing and moving forward."

ROOM TO BREATHE

Expansion and progression are clearly instinctive things to a firm like Axis, which has quickly built up an impressive client list across the game, film, television and advertising sectors, recently contributing to *Mass Effect 2*, *Singularity* and *Killzone 2*. So what's the secret?

"I think our success lies in being able to always strive for the highest quality in our work and have the best people possible working for us," suggests Scott.

"Alongside that we are flexible and have a personal approach. We've also adapted a lot during that growth and not been afraid to try new structures and work in different ways and for different clients."

With international business development underway and an ever-expanding client list across the entertainment industries, it's impossible to refute Axis' accomplishments, but the firm's model does beg one question. In taking on board projects from the silver and small screens, is there not a danger of spreading too thin?

In fact, reveals Scott, Axis' broad focus has a twofold advantage: "First we get a range of exciting projects to consider. This keeps our portfolio fresh and the team excited, as they love the variation of tasks.

> ***"Games need to compete for everyone's entertainment dollar. We're proud of the trailers that we make and the excitment they create."***
>
> Richard Scott, Axis Animation

"The second advantage is the ability to not be pigeonholed as only doing certain work. Recently our focus has fallen on the video games and commercials work, which gives a range of projects from stylised to photo-real."

RISING TO FACE IT

Still, Axis' history has not been one without challenge. Aside from having never been in business before the studio's conception, Scott and his co-workers have had to tackle the problems all developing businesses face: recruiting the right people, knowing when to hire at the top level, knowing when to add support resource, maintaining client relationships and most importantly, balancing creativity with profitability.

"I think we have overcome them with dogged determination, passion and the need for creativity to be at the core of everything; we definitely never let money get in the way of doing the best job. And of course we have a lot of laughs along the way," says Scott.

Overcoming those hurdles has of course defined Axis' triumph, and in its ten-year history its client list has become something it is extremely proud of.

"We are delighted to have grown into an international animation studio from our Glasgow base which – let's be honest – has never been a big hub for animation," states Scott. "Our ability work with some of the biggest names in entertainment is a testament to our people and our aim to produce the best work no matter what."

In its position as a leading animation studio, Axis is also well placed to spot trends that will continue to dictate the development of the animation sector.

According to Scott, real-time graphics are going to influence the animation sector dramatically. Axis has already seen real-time solutions being used in pre-visualisation of features, television and commercials, and the lighting and rendering pipelines of animated features and VFX.

"As computer power increases we will see these technologies become more common and the convergence with the games industry won't stop," asserts Scott.

Scott is also quick to defend the work by Axis and its contemporaries, which on occasion is criticised by consumers suspicious of footage that isn't gameplay.

"I think what we do is part of the shift in video games evolution into mainstream entertainment. Games need to compete for everyone's entertainment dollar and trailers and all marketing materials are a big part of that. We're proud of the trailers that we make and the excitement they create for lots of different titles," he says.

In typically friendly fashion Scott concludes with some advice for aspiring animation studios looking to enjoy Axis' success.

"One of the things we found difficult in the early years was that we all came from similar creative backgrounds, which is great when you're really small as you need the ability to do the work and run the business. Eventually though, you need different skill sets at a management level and the best case scenario would have been to have those in the original founders of the company and have them take that through every area as you grow."

www.axisanimation.com

The Kids are Alright

Black Rock Studio will be throwing their doors open to an invasion of youngsters this summer as part of Disney XD's Aim High campaign, which hopes to generate excitement about potential future careers. **Stuart Richardson** had a chat with the studio's audio director Steve Rockett and lead designer Ian Hudson to find out just what the kids are getting up to these days…

Branding from the Disney XD channel is set to help the campaign attract some attention

Disney ain't what it used to be. This is by no means a bad thing, of course. *The Princess and the Frog* was something of a return-to-form for the company last summer, but the days of surviving on a yearly animated film release based on a classic fairytale or legend (or Shakespeare tragedy) are long gone.

Modern Disney is Disney-Pixar. It's *Epic Mickey*, Warren Spector and Steve Jobs. It's also Black Rock Studio and *Split/Second*.

This summer, Disney will be running a campaign of mentorships aimed at viewers of its Disney XD channel – generally boys and girls between six and 14, though the mean age likely increases around the time *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is on – in an attempt to get them excited by the prospect of their future careers.

As part of that scheme, alongside other oppourtunities like meeting Darren Bent and Tinchy Stryder, Disney's game developer subsidiary Black Rock Studio will be opening its doors to a host of XD viewers in order to give them and idea of just what it is like to make video games for a living.

"Aim High is an inspirational format that really delivers a positive message to kids," says Black Rock audio director Steve Rockett, one of the assigned metors at the studio. "It inspires young people to try and get the most out of life and give the best to whatever they do."

Black Rock lead designer and joint-mentor Ian Hudson agrees with this.

"It's a great way to introduce kids to these sort of jobs that they may be interested in, and to show them that they are viable and something they should go for," he says.

"I'm not sure how the industry is pushed as a career in schools, but kids love playing games so to be able to invite them to come and try making games and introduce them to this career is an absolute pleasure."

Both men seem passionate about sharing their knowledge with what could well be the next generation of coders and designers.

"I think this idea is comparible to what has been going on in the music industry in the past few years in that it shows we are becoming much more accessible, and now people see it for what it is – a great place to work," says Rockett.

"There is huge job satisfaction and in a place like Black Rock you get to move around between jobs within a single company as much or as little as you see fit."

In terms of what Black Rock's contribution to Aim High will be, both men are excited about the plans they have in place.

"Well firstly the kids will meet us in the early afternoon, and with me they will spend their time in the studio learning how the audio for *Split/Second* was designed," enthuses Rockett.

Black Rock Studio's Ian Hudson (left) and Steve Rockett (right)

> ***"Kids love playing games so to be able to invite them to come and try making games and introduce them to this career is an absolute pleasure."***
>
> Ian Hudson, Black Rock Studio

"I will introduce them to the whole team and explain how the audio is created. I will take them through the process of creating different sounds for games, all basic but very important and interesting stuff. We will listen to car engine sounds and look at how to capture them, and have a hand-on go at basic recording as well. At the end of the day, we will try putting some of those sounds to pictures, hopefully showing the kids how easy it can be to enhance a visual image with good sound design."

Hudson is equally passionate about his new reposibilities as an Aim High mentor.

"As the lead track designer, I will be showing our guests how we create tracks, and specifically those that we created for *Split/Second*, which are very different to any others that we have created," he says.

"We will take them through the processes of animation, environment art, track design and so on. I think the most exciting part of the process myself is when you see a track that you have designed in-game for the first time, so hopefully we will be able to get the guys doing just that and getting to play their tracks inside the *Split/Second* world."

AN EDUCATION

Both men are also acutely aware of the potential issues in convincing boys and girls of a certain age to get involved in anything that may fall under the remit of 'work'. They seem convinced, however, that they have the magic formula to pique their interest.

"Kids love playing games," says Hudson.

"When they see their ideas appearing in those games, well that's just thrilling, and it definitely gives them the idea that this isn't that hard to do and they have the ability to do it. I think it will attract a lot of people.

Rockett is equally certain of the ability of Black Rock's set-up to fascinate their visitors: "It'll be inspiring, I think, for them to see just how quickly you can get things up and running. I think they'll enjoy that."

The success of the project will be a difficult thing to ascertain without travelling several decades into the future to see what the Black Rock kids will be up to at that time, but Aim High certainly scores points for proactivity and good intentions. Hudson is also keen to point out that the whole thing would probably struggle without the aid of Disney.

"It's such a huge name, and going through Disney XD will provide us with massive exposure. That's obviously a plus for us, to know that we will be going through such a big channel with a massive audience. So it's great both ways. None of this would have been possible if we had been an indie studio."

Disney ain't what it used to be.

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Daydream Believers

As part of Develop's ongoing Game Changers series, which looks at companies redefining games, we turned our attention to nDreams. **Stuart Richardson** caught up with CEO Patrick O'Luanaigh to discuss the creation of games for the modern audience…

Games are exciting. They let you be whatever and whoever you like. They break down the passive wall of books, films and music, drawing you into the thick of the action. They utilise revolutionary technology and ideas to tell their stories, which through the playing of them become your stories.

Games also cross media with an ease that other forms of story-telling cannot hope to match. They can be played anywhere, at any time, and in any medium. The possibilites in every aspect of games are limitless, though some developers could be accused of forgetting this from time-to-time.

Not so with nDreams. The Hampshire-based firm, founded in 2006, has been developing alternate reality games based on platforms as varied as Facebook (*Spirit of Adventure*); Playstation Home (*Xi*) and corporate websites (*Lewis Hamilton: Secret Life*) for the entirety of its short existence. It's been redefining both what a video game is and what a video game studio actually does.

> ***"We're building up the number of games and digital content we publish. We're also releasing our first iPhone and iPad titles."***
>
> Patrick O'Luanaigh

WHAT DREAMS MAY COME

nDreams is currently hard at work on a top secret title for XBLA and PSN. As for what can be expected this time, one thing seems certain – judging by the way in which nDreams operates creatively – whaever it is up to, it won't be like anything we have seen from it or most likely anyone else before.

"We're trying to create new kinds of games," says nDreams CEO Patrick O'Luanaigh.

"We're planning to push PlayStation Home in a big way as a games platform in its own right soon. We have something very exciting in pre-production for PSN and XBLA which will be different from everything that's come before."

nDreams is undergoing a level of expansion that suggests its dream for the future is backed up by a substantial level of business acumen.

"We're building up the number of new games and digital content we publish," says O'Luanaigh. "We're also growing our team and releasing our first iPhone and iPad titles."

This growth, while undoubtably eminating from the studio's earlier successes, seems to be based around the idea that the industry is altering substantially during the ongoing casual games and digital distribution revolution.

"Traditional publishers are retreating to the safety of big triple-A titles during the recession, while new developers and publishers have sprung up focusing on the new digital platforms. We're really excited about the future, and we're seeing a number of great new UK-based developers and publishers thriving on the new platforms," says O'Luanaigh.

This excitement is something that seems to be shared by nDreams in its entirety, and that translated into a prolific period of development.

"We hope to announce a number of new projects, larger in scale and scope than we've done so far," explains O'Luanaigh. "We're continuing to focus on innovation and creating new kinds of games. You'll see more on the App Store, PSN, XBLA and Playstation Home."

The firm has a strong self image, and O'Luanaigh has an impressive level of confidence about what nDreams is and why it deserves to be talked about.

"I hope our appeal is that we deliver high quality games which are commercial yet unique," he says. "We have a focus on 'social storytelling', and most of our projects involve narrative in various forms. We have exciting ideas for a different kind of game right now."

Keeping one step ahead of convention is clearly something that has quickly become so synonymous with the firm's image that maintaining it is important for keeping its relevance. This would be a daunting position for the most hardened of veteran studios, but O'Luanaigh and nDreams seem to feed off of the challenge and use it for content creation.

"We're always trying new things. We've learnt a great deal over the last few years, and we're using that knowledge to get beter," O'Luanaigh states. "In this evolving space, it's great to be able to switch quickly when necessary."

And what of the future? For nDreams an accurate forecast of trends to come, or even better an ability to set those trends, would more than likely be worth every penny in the bank. Luckily perhaps, O'Luanaigh has a very clear idea of what he thinks is coming: "We'll see cross-platform digital games, Apple becoming the primary gaming platform owner, a rise in narrative-focused casual games and more money being made from PSN and XBLA than through PS3 and Xbox 360 retail."

Whatever the new projects turn out to be, nDreams will certainly be showing the industry something it has never seen before. Whether or not we'll want to see it again will largely come back to O'Luanaigh's choices for his company over the coming months and years.

Judging by how things have gone so far, neither man nor firm has anything to fear.

www.ndreams.co.uk

Above: Patrick O'Luanaigh, CEO at nDreams

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Texture Adventures

Next up in our Game changers series, **Will Freeman** turns his attention to Allegorithmic and its hugely significant Substance Redux texturing middleware…

Above: Dr. Sebastien Deguy, president and founder of Allegorithmic

In concept at least, what Allegorithmic does is very simple. The tech company's most significant middleware offering, Substance Redux, serves to automatically compress textures for online games.

In reality, Allegorithmic's creation is cleverly intricate and complex at the backend, but that alone doesn't warrant a place in the Game Changers series. Why the French-headquartered firm stars here is because Allegorithmic is the procedural texture rendering middleware sector.

While other middleware fields, such as animation and mocap, play host to a cacophony of competing companies, Allegoritmic spearheads texture rendering and compression almost single-handedly, with a lead solution that can be implemented at any stage of an online title's development, from conception to post-release.

Perhaps the field's relative tranquillity is because texturing doesn't carry the consumer friendly nature of graphics, and doesn't conjure up easily romanticised notions like the infamous uncanny valley.

Regardless, Redux's potential to online game developers is considerable. It can reduce the overall size of a game by 20 to 50 per cent; a factor that can make or break a release that's financial success depends on how easy it is to download.

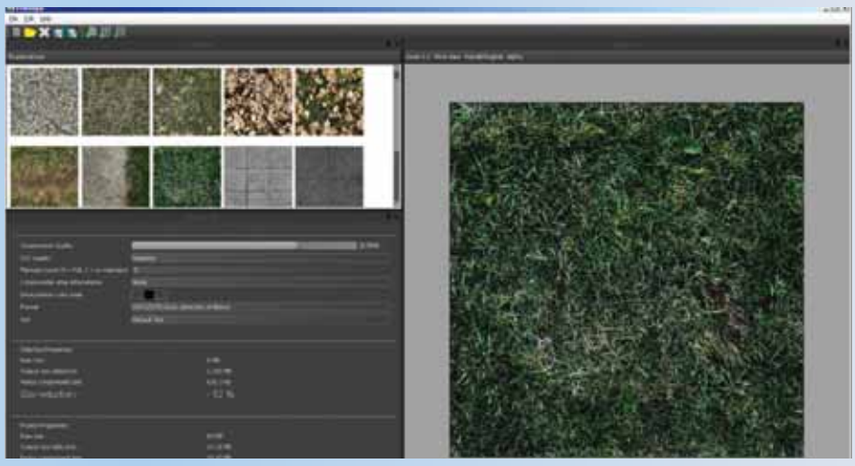
COMPILING NEW ORDER

Launched in May this year, Substance Redux was actually created when Allegorithmic was trying to licence Substance Air – an established middleware solution for texture production – to online game developers in Asia. Many of the studios revealed to the middleware provider that they were interested in a parallel solution to Air for their existing games.

"Recreating the textures with Substance Air was the solution that provided the best results in terms of space savings, but, due to time constraints, it was also very open to a solution for automatically compressing existing assets," reveals Dr. Sébastien Deguy, Allegorithmic's president and founder.

"Substance Redux is the answer to that issue: it provides a 50 to 70 per cent size reduction of all your texture assets in just a few short hours with no special skills needed."

While the team at Deguy's firm provides tools that allow its customers to create textures in a new and improved way, more importantly, Allegorithmic is the only company that has runtime components associated with almost all of its many products.



"Combined with a unique, patented set of technologies, this allows us to be a true middleware and tools provider, fully dedicated to the tricky and expensive task of producing and delivering huge amounts of texture data," confirms Deguy.

> ***"We have to create a presence and make the need for this product apparent. Or make them understand the value of switching to this new way of creating textures."***
>
> Dr. Sebastien Deguy

Recognising the casual, MMO, mobile, web and free-to-play sectors as key descriptors of what it calls the 'new order' for games, Allegorithmic has demonstrated a keen ability to recognise leading trends in the industry and make them its own.

While numerous middleware companies struggle to catch-up with the rush to cater for developers making smaller games for digital platforms, Allegorithmic is forging ahead with offering a solution that'll dramatically increase revenues for those creating online games.

"Casual equals instant action for players, which means immediate streaming of data. So, the smaller the data, the faster the access," explains Deguy. "Casual also means a short development time and lower budget for creators, which means dedicated, easy-to-use tools and customisable content.

"MMO means a lot of content needs to be created and distributed by the developers and publishers. Hence generative techniques and smaller data sizes are key here."

Put simply, there's a range of increasingly prominent platforms and markets that need what Allegorithmic offers. Mobile and web models mean 'on-air' and online distribution, leading to the need for compact content, while free-to-play demands a direct relationship between the time before play and the success of a game; an area where the fast consumer download times could prove extremely important. The Substance tool suite really is the key package letting customers produce compact and dynamic textures.

Allegorithmic is also a company not content with resting on laurels.

"We still have a long way to go," admits Deguy. "So far, our successes have come from the fact that we have been talking to very smart people in the industry, all from the biggest companies – Funcom, The 9, NVIDIA, Intel, Autodesk and Dassault Systèmes.

"These companies were able to understand what we have, even when it was a prototype. They saw potential, unique technology and that we are a trustworthy company."

Deguy is also a man who can recognise and accept the challenges that his business faces.

"The biggest challenge we have faced is bringing innovation to the market," says Deguy. "Texture artists were not expecting to see a solution like this. We have to create a presence and make the need for this product apparent to those who need it the most. Or, at least, make them understand the value of switching to this new way of creating textures."

Deguy is the first to admit that, although Allegorithmic's offering brings tremendous value to the artists that it serves, creators still have to change the way they work.

"But this is also what makes the challenge exciting," adds Deguy. "When we succeed, we'll change the industry for the better and our technology will become a standard."

www.allegorithmic.com

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INTELLIGENCE ENGINEERED

Phoenix rising

After something of a hiatus from the games industry, Richard Branson's Virgin Group is making a high profile return. **Will Freeman** asks one of its co-founders what that means to developers…

Entrepreneur and adventurer Sir Richard Branson has turned his attention back to games. Based on the business tycoon's previous relationship with the industry, that fact could be a significant one for developers.

Established way back in 1984 as a publisher, Virgin Games rose to prominence in the 1990s, when it handled foremost developer labels including LucasArts, Capcom and Bethesda.

Highly regarded series like *Broken Sword* and *Cannon Fodder* have Virgin to thank for their debuts. Similarly, a number of development veterans like David Perry and famed composer Tommy Tallarico had their careers launched by Branson's company, which was most successful operating under the name Virgin Interactive.

Additionally, Virgin's investment in Trilobyte's FMV-based horror title *The 7th Guest* delivered a significant boost to the evolution of high-end CD-ROM multimedia gaming, subsequently providing a milestone for the development of gaming formats.

Gradually Virgin's potency in the traditional games industry faded, as Branson and his colleague's shifted their focus to online prize-based content.

COMPETITIVE SPIRIT

Now its hiatus from conventional gaming is over, Virgin is back, albeit in a rather different form. Today Virgin Gaming is based around the branding of website that lets players from across the globe connect and compete in a range of online tournaments. Ultimately, the website allows gamers to challenge one another at a number of console games, clashing to claim cash and other prizes.

In the past competitive gaming defined how people consumed interactive entertainment. In a nod to that heritage, Virgin Gaming's offering is underpinned by a skill ranking system that purports to offer a levelled playing field for all who rise to the challenge,. Conversely, the team headed up by CEO Rob Segal is also demonstrating a savvy recognition of where consumer's gaming habits are taking the industry. From Facebook to XBLA, people are tackling games together and in opposition.

> ***"We have a proprietary game validation system that automatically verifies and updates the results of all games played through the site"***
>
> Billy Levy, Virgin Games

But what tech underpins Virgin's new vision for gaming, and what does this evolution mean to developers?

"The technology behind Virgin Gaming really sets us apart," insists the firm's co-founder and president Billy Levy. "We have a proprietary game validation system that automatically verifies and updates the results of all games played through the site, thus automating all tournaments and competitions and adding security and authenticity to the process."

That technology guarantees the fair play that is the cornerstone of Virgin Gaming's service, and allows the team handling the competitions to be completely flexible with regard to creating and scaling tournaments. Instead of needing days or weeks to organise a large-scale competition, the staff at Virgin Gaming can organise and run a 256-person online event in hours.

BENEFIT OF THE CLOUT

As for the benefit to games creators, Virgin Gaming has a great deal to offer developers, primarily because the platform provides a flexible extension of and complement to their games.

The online tournaments promise to provide a tool to help generate interest, spur sales, extend shelf life and minimise trade ins. Furthermore, Virgin Gaming has opportunities for developers of all types as the company instigates its planned move beyond the console into the popular social and mobile gaming sector.

It's hard to refute the fact that Virgin Gaming's arrival is incredibly timely in that regard. It ably rides the wave of change currently influencing all most every facet of games industry ecosystem; an enviable position secured though a grass roots connection with the world of organised competitive gaming.

"The games industry is constantly evolving and, since playing games competitively was a major part of Zack Zeldin [vice president of gaming operations and co-founder] and my lifestyle. We had the foresight, and luck, to go

Above: Virgin Gaming co-founders and competitive players Billy Levy (left) and Zack Zeldin (right)

Above: Virgin Gaming's cash-stuffed truck at E3, containing some of the bounty players will clash over

in the direction of competitive, skill-based gaming. It seemed natural for us; we were doing it, our friends were doing it, leagues were popping up all over the place – so we felt that the natural progression was to take game tournaments online."

Billy, who has known Zack since university, tells tales of the pair competing through gaming for everything from who was buying takeaways to who had to clean the dishes. The pair also spent a lot of money entering gaming tournaments – a fact that played a major part in inspiring them to create what has become the new Virgin Gaming service.

PARALLEL LINES

However, while personal enthusiasm and experience makes for a robust keystone for any business, it doesn't guarantee a professional experience free from challenges. Fortunately for Levy and his colleagues, an open-minded approach has allowed them to pre-empt many of the hurdles that have become a stalling point for the few rival platforms that offer a parallel service.

"We knew many of the challenges going in, but we discovered a lot of new ones as we progressed," admits Levy. "We looked at all of the problems that existed on some of the other sites that were trying to offer online video game tournaments – that was when we realised that our technology needed to be really sound. We couldn't rely on the individual players to accurately self-report wins and losses," he adds.

"We also needed to have a reputation system in place so that the community could police itself – similar to eBay. Finally, we knew that our customer service team had to be comprised of actual gamers that were familiar with the games we featured and that would be able to resolve any issues in a manner that would be fair and satisfactory to both parties involved."

Ultimately, Levy is confident about both the potential of the new Virgin Gaming business, and what it can offer to developers. Playing on the sporting nature that is innate to many players, and the inherent competitive mechanic that is at the core of many titles' design, Virgin Gaming has every chance of success.

"The fact that gamers can take something they are passionate about and be able to get more out of it than just bragging rights is huge," concludes Levy. "Virgin Gaming is also an ideal place for gamers to just network and find quality competition.

"Some of the best feedback we've had from our community has been about friends they've made and/or the quality of competition they've found on the site."

Developers interested in more information can contact the Virgin Gaming team at partners@virgingaming.com

PULLING RANK

VIRGIN GAMING'S NEW APPROACH to gaming is undeniably an intriguing one, but ultimately its success depends on one factor; consumers need to warm to the competitive structure.

For many, the likes of Xbox Live have perpetuated the myth that playing against strangers means being annihilated by a youngster on the other side of the planet who has apparently innumerable hours to perfect their ability.

"We want developers to understand that our goal is to take their great games and make them even better by allowing players from around the world to participate in massive tournaments for huge prizes," explains Virgin Gaming's co-founder and president Billy Levy.

"We work together with our partners to help market their games and provide yet another avenue for their audience to engage and compete."

It's at that point that the ranking system comes into play. Virgin Gaming is designed to make it possible for gamers of all skill levels to enter a tournament and feel confident that they have a real chance of walking away a winner.

That considered, it looks very likely that the competitive tournament gaming model could work, meaning developers could quickly reap the benefits Levy and his team promise.

The return of Virgin Gaming may well shake up the industry to exactly the same level it did a decade ago, when it made changes that can still be felt to this day.

Blizzard Entertainment Re-imagines *StarCraft**

By John Gaudiosi

Blizzard Entertainment took the PC gaming world by storm back in 1998 with the release of *StarCraft**. The real-time strategy (RTS) game ushered in a new dawn of strategy gameplay and introduced millions of gamers to the violent twenty-sixth century universe inhabited by the warring factions of the Terrans (human exiles from Earth), the Zerg (an insectoid race), and the Protoss (a psionic alien race). According to the NPD Group, a video game research firm, Blizzard has sold over 4.7 million *StarCraft* games in the United States alone through December 2009. According to Aaron "AJ" Biggs, owner of the fan site Starcraft.org, over the past ten years the *StarCraft* community has been an extremely vocal and active set of users.

"Blizzard's desire to ship games that will run well on such a wide gamut of systems has always led to very healthy user-base numbers," said Biggs. "With the growth of the Internet, fan sites, and social networking, communities for a game like *StarCraft* have seen a great growth spurt."

Now Blizzard is ready to unleash on this growing fan base *StarCraft II*, one of the most anticipated PC game sequels of all time, which will stay true to its strategy roots with hardcore RTS gameplay, while pushing the envelope with new 3D graphics and breathtaking in-game cinematics that come to life on the latest PCs.

"After finishing *WarCraft® III: The Frozen Throne®*, we got together as a team and decided we wanted to make *StarCraft II*, and in doing that we very quickly determined that we wanted to hark back to the legacy of the original game, so there was a sense of nostalgia for players that played the original," explained Chris Sigaty, lead producer of *StarCraft II*. "But we wanted to bring the game up to modern times and introduce a brand new 3D engine and add new units. We wanted approximately 60 percent new content to 40 percent old, and we ended up largely there today."

Sigaty and his team focused on two areas of innovation with *StarCraft II*: the single-player campaign, which spans three unique races, and the online multi-player experience on the newly redesigned Battle.net. While getting these two goals on a piece of paper was easy, figuring out the technology and gameplay design around these objectives took a lot of time and brain power. But the end result is poised to deliver an updated and improved experience that should satisfy the most devoted fans of this franchise—and there are many.

A Deeper Experience

StarCraft II is a massive game. In fact, it's so large that the story will evolve over three parts. In the main game, *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*, the action picks up four years after the events of the last adventure, *StarCraft: Brood War*, and follows the exploits of Jim Raynor as he leads an insurgent group against the autocratic Terran Dominion. However, unable to inflict major damage against the Dominion, Raynor's forces are relegated to the roles of mercenaries, recovering artifacts of an ancient species thought extinct, the Xel'Naga, for their enigmatic employers.

But that's just the beginning. Blizzard Entertainment is planning two expansion sets to further evolve the story and focus on the other two factions: *Heart of the Swarm* will focus on the Zerg and Kerrigan, Queen of the Blades, and the second expansion set, *Legacy of Void*, will center on the Protoss. Blizzard Entertainment's introduction of story mode in the new trilogy of games brings the player deeper into the environment.

"If you look back to *StarCraft*, the story was linear and largely told by putting you in a briefing room. Character portraits would talk to you, then the text of the mission would spill up on the screen, and you'd get your story elements, and jump in and play a mission, and then jump out for more story," said Sigaty. "Now players can choose to talk to different characters that they run into and even pick the missions they want to go on in a non-linear fashion. This opens up experiences for the player."

It also presented a challenge for the developer of how to pack so much content into three games. Each story will offer about 30 missions in which the players can engage. And as players graduate from one game to the next, the story will progress. Despite having three unique races, there's an overarching story line that will ultimately offer what Blizzard hopes is a rewarding conclusion to this trilogy.

The company also believes that new fans will be born from *StarCraft II*. The team made sure to construct a self-contained game that newbies can enter and enjoy without having to play the previous games. With over 11.5 million gamers, including many mainstream fans, playing *World of WarCraft®* around the globe, Sigaty sees

the potential for crossover, and the game has been designed to appeal to anyone who gives it a try.

"From our perspective, the gaming lens has changed since the old days," said Sigaty. "Certainly with RTS being generally a hardcore genre, we need to help new players by explaining the gameplay and the strategic depth of mining minerals and gathering gas, and building up bases and units. But for those fans who have been waiting for this game, they'll be able to jump in and gain extra insight into the story through returning characters and other franchise staples."

Designing the 3D Playing Field

From a technology standpoint, a lot has changed since the expansion pack from *StarCraft I* was released. Fans such as Biggs believe that the leap from 2D-based sprites to fully-modeled 3D units in *StarCraft II* change the visuals, but not the gameplay dynamics that gamers have enjoyed for the past decade.

"Blizzard's focus on scalability is key to their game's technical design, but not [being] willing to sacrifice visual experience in *StarCraft II* has led to great advances in the engine's shader framework system," explained Biggs. "This optimization also extends to the choice of GPU performance over CPU, to account for the wide variance in possible units to be drawn on-screen, ranging from just a handful to several hundred in an online game. The focus was shifted from traditional high polygon count art assets resulting in large model vertex counts to an optimized pixel shader load, much more suited to a real-time strategy game."

Blizzard Entertainment created a brand new fixed-pipeline 3D engine for *WarCraft III* and built upon that for *StarCraft II*'s next-gen, shader-based 3D engine. The same team worked on both recent games and helped evolve the technology. The *StarCraft II* game engine features a full accoutrement of effects, including screen-space ambient occlusion; deferred rendering; high dynamic range lighting; normal, specular, emissive, and environment maps; decals; dynamic lighting and shadows; self-shadowing; volumetric and multilayered materials; displacement; Havok Physics*; and inverse kinematics support.

"Our first 3D engine was *WarCraft III* and that game was very different from the original *StarCraft*," explained Sigaty. "We tried to keep the number of total units down in a game. We actually added the functionality of upkeep in *WarCraft III* that limited what players wanted in the game, so they were rewarded for having smaller numbers to some extent. But with *StarCraft II*, we wanted to go back to the larger fodder units style that the original *StarCraft* had. We wanted to develop a 3D engine that could support lots of units on the screen at the same time, while still holding visual fidelity for players to pick up on. We feel like the iconic nature of our other games was

important to keep in here, so we wanted to score as much visual pizzazz as we could and really have a lot of power in the engine."

Another focus on this new engine was to ensure that it had the horsepower to not only run the RTS gameplay, but also support the in-game cinematics. The game's cut scenes feature full-sized characters and photorealistic storytelling that pushes the experience forward.

The end result is an eye-popping visual feast that really shines on high-end PCs running on the latest Intel® processors. In addition to showcasing vibrant 3D visuals and a cavalcade of colors, this engine can host a ton of units for more intense RTS gameplay. Sigaty said his team decided to create a shader-based engine for this game because that technology was evolving during the production of *StarCraft II*. At the time of *WarCraft III*, it just wasn't ready based on the technology of that time.

"*StarCraft II* is a faster-paced game and we wanted to capture that, so it was really important that the engine was capable of not only displaying a lot of the units on the screen, but also running well when doing so," explained Sigaty. "We had a lot of trials and tribulations in developing this engine and ensuring that it worked well across all the different hardware that's on the market today.

Blizzard worked with companies such as Intel to make sure that *StarCraft II* works efficiently on the latest PCs and supports the largest group of systems and video cards on the market today. Sigaty said his team had the foresight from the start of development to look to the future of processing power and technology.

Intel has been a key force in supporting games running on Intel® architecture for many years, through both the development of new capabilities and the introduction of new form factors. As early as 1999, Blizzard began working with Intel to understand the details and upcoming changes of the consumer PC platform. Knowing which Intel® processor-based PCs would be available to their worldwide customer base by the time their games hit the stores helped Blizzard understand how new technology would affect their gamers' gameplay.

THE PROMISE OF GOOD GAMEPLAY FOR THE GAMER IS JOB #1

"From the early days of engaging with Blizzard, they have been focused on knowing their customer and how their customers experience their games on the ever-evolving PC," said Cathy Kinzer, Blizzard's long-time account manager at Intel. "Making business relationships work requires knowing what drives the company's success, then making plans to work with them to help grow and deliver their consumer promise.

"At Blizzard, the promise of good gameplay for the gamer is job #1," continued Kinzer. "Blizzard understands the nature of their market, and they want to make sure that they give their customer base a great experience on the PC without giving any gameplay advantages to one over the other because of technology. I have always viewed the Intel relationship with Blizzard as one of the key forces that drives the growth of PC gaming worldwide. It serves us both best if we keep the gamer in mind while we work with Blizzard's game developers."

As a result of Intel's relationship with Blizzard, Intel developed training, tools, early release hardware, roadmap education, consultation services, and co-marketing programs to help Blizzard drive continued success in development and marketing to their gaming customers. This formula has worked for both Blizzard and Intel, and has been the basis for forming the foundation of engagement with the *StarCraft® II* team.

"Intel engineers worked with Blizzard teams to get Blizzard's games running fast and looking great on PCs," said Brad Werth, a technical marketing engineer at Intel. "With *StarCraft II*, one main focus of the collaboration was to secure good performance on mainstream graphics hardware. During alpha testing, Intel engineers used the Intel® Graphics Performance Analyzers (Intel® GPA) to find optimization opportunities in the shadow-drawing code. The use of Intel GPA, in conjunction with the early-access graphics hardware that Intel provided to Blizzard, ensured that *StarCraft II* could be enjoyed by millions of PC gamers—from mainstream to the bleeding edge." ■

"As we develop new games, we continually manage to push our limits," said Sigaty. "Our minimum system requirements have come up every year, even though originally we set out with these goals to hit some lower-end systems. Every year it seems like we keep pushing what that level is because of what we're trying to accomplish with our engine."

"There is no doubt *StarCraft II* will be an action-packed, graphically intensive game that will be experienced best with the fastest and most powerful CPU and GPU options available," said StarCraft.org's Biggs. "Intel's current processors are definitely poised to help deliver that killer experience to any diehard gamer. No one enjoys playing a game if they're subject to interface or gameplay lag, stuttering performance, or slowed load times. Owning a current generation Intel® processor will definitely help avoid those troubles and add to the fun and enjoyment of *StarCraft II*."

Connected Gaming

StarCraft II is the first game to showcase the new and improved Battle.net online multi-player gaming service, which has been built from the ground up to support all upcoming Blizzard titles, as well as existing games. While the original service has satisfied gamers for 13 years now, Blizzard decided to give its technology an upgrade to take advantage of today's socially-connected and multi-platform digital world. The team focused on three core tenets: the always-connected experience, the competitive arena for everyone, and connecting the Blizzard community.

"Battle.net has been integrated into *StarCraft II* from the presentation standpoint of the customer," said Greg Canessa, project director at Battle.net. "That is a little different from online game services such as Steam*, Xbox* Live, and PlayStation* Network because they're platforms and they're constrained by the need to support many different types of games in a uniform fashion. From the back-end standpoint, we're building a scalable, agnostic game service that all Blizzard games can plug into going forward, starting with *StarCraft II*, but also extending over to *World of WarCraft*, *Diablo* III*, and to other unannounced future titles."

All gamers will now have a persistent *StarCraft II* identity on Battle.net, which will track all activities—social, competitive, and others, such as a player's win-loss record, league and ladders, achievements, and social network. Canessa compared this identity to a character one creates for *World of WarCraft*. *StarCraft II* players will always be connected online, whether playing a single-player mission or a multi-player battle. Players will also be able to communicate with friends both inside and outside the game at any time. There will even be two levels of interactivity, the standard Character ID communication and the advanced Real ID exchange, in which two consenting players can track each other by real name on their friends' lists, gain rich presence information, and communicate across different Blizzard games or between *World of Warcraft* realms."

"We have cloud file storage, so you'll be able to save the game transparently up to Battle.net, and if you roam or use other computers at a friend's house or in an Internet game room, you'll be able to have your saved name and carry it with you," explained Canessa. "You'll be able to upload your published maps or saved maps, and if you're in the pro league you'll be able to upload your game replays."

Battle.net also introduces a robust achievement system for all of *StarCraft II's* single- and multi-player modes, including unlockable rewards that are tied to achievements. As players get better at the game, they'll gain access to items that can be showcased, such as new character portraits. Beyond the aesthetic appeal of these items, players can

unlock vanity decals to customize the look of their armies in-game. Presented in the form of a virtual sticker book that shows what's available and how to earn it, gamers will be able to learn what achievements they need to unlock special portraits and decals.

In keeping with its mainstream focus, Blizzard has streamlined the automated online multi-player matchmaking process to make it accessible to all levels of players. Friends will be able to seamlessly find each other online. And those looking to jump right into the action need only to select a rate and a game type and then start waging war.

"We have a lot of internal technology behind the scenes—such as intelligent matchmaking algorithms—that are working to match players against like-skilled individuals with a far greater degree of accuracy than anything that's out there today," said Canessa.

It's Your Galaxy

Customization has become a key component of video games today, and Blizzard is delivering in this department with new user-generated content for the *StarCraft II* community to share. At some point after *StarCraft II* ships, a Marketplace will be introduced to Battle.net where users can upload, distribute, and even sell their custom maps, campaigns, and genre-changing add-ons. Fans are already clamoring for this new user-generated feature and thinking about the long-term effect it will have on sustaining this sequel for decades to come through original content.

"One of the most exciting advances to me is that of the newly designed bundled map editor that will allow user-generated content to attain a whole new level of immersion," said Biggs. "While even the original *StarCraft* shipped with a bundled map editor, this new innovation goes so far as to allow users, via its own proprietary 'Galaxy' scripting language (based on C), to modify the game's core

Blizzard Luminaries

Although hundreds of creative people poured their hearts into the development of *StarCraft* II* over the past few years, two Blizzard luminaries played an instrumental role in sculpting the ideas that the team and millions of fans offered into a cohesive and cutting-edge RTS experience.

As a lead producer for Blizzard, Chris Sigaty was responsible for overseeing the team that created *StarCraft II*. This involved planning the project's schedule, identifying and resolving issues, facilitating communication, and ensuring that all team members had everything needed to craft an exemplary game.

Sigaty started at Blizzard in 1996 as a quality assurance tester and was able to parlay hard work and know-how into a fruitful career. After taking on additional responsibilities in the quality assurance and localization departments, he became a producer on *Warcraft* III: Reign of Chaos** and its expansion, *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne**. He later contributed to *World of Warcraft** before moving to his current role. In what little spare time he's able to find between work and caring for his new twin boys, Sigaty plays PC and console games extensively, in addition to playing guitar and writing music.

While Sigaty focused on the *StarCraft II* game, Greg Canessa, as a project director for Blizzard, oversaw the development of the next generation of Battle.net, the company's popular online gaming service. He leads a team dedicated to crafting the network from the ground up to offer a polished, feature-rich competitive and social experience to players for years to come. The revamped Battle.net will debut with *StarCraft II* but will be implemented across all Blizzard titles in the coming years.

Before joining Blizzard Entertainment in May 2009, Canessa managed PopCap Games' console and handheld projects as its vice president of video game platforms, and prior to that he was the general manager of Microsoft's Xbox LIVE* Arcade service. During his seven years at Microsoft, Canessa was instrumental in the development of Xbox LIVE and was the man behind the launch of Xbox LIVE Arcade. Canessa is now taking Blizzard's brands and introducing an online marketplace experience aimed at PC gamers.

Canessa holds a Bachelor's degree in international studies and computer science from Pepperdine University, and a dual Master's degree in business administration and international management from the University of Colorado at Denver. He enjoys skiing and racket sports in his spare time, and is a lifelong gamer with an appreciation of games across all genres and platforms, including his collection of over 400 board games from around the world. ■

IN ADDITION TO SHOWCASING VIBRANT 3D VISUALS AND A CAVALCADE OF COLORS, THIS ENGINE CAN HOST A TON OF UNITS FOR MORE INTENSE RTS GAMEPLAY.

display and gameplay mechanics. For example, it is possible to completely re-script the display to the extent that the game is no longer an RTS, but can be played and interacted with as though it were a first-person shooter or top-down scroller. Some of these options were previewed at last year's BlizzCon, in addition to the inclusion of the Marketplace within the upgraded Battle.net."

The Future of RTS

At the end of the day, no matter how dazzling a game looks, how engaging the story is, or how many options there are to communicate among players, it's the gameplay that ultimately wins over the fans and keeps them logging in for more combat. *StarCraft II* offers a robust option of online multi-player cooperative and competitive experiences for players to engage in for years to come. Whether jumping into the new Practice League designed for more casual players (it automatically locks out more skilled veterans) or embarking on intense league gameplay with 100 other people with a full season of challenges, Blizzard has taken the necessary time to ensure that this strategy experience pushes the genre—and the very experience—forward. It may not be the twenty-sixth century yet, but PC gamers can get a taste for the future of warfare right now. ■

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10 ways to generate great ideas

As the economy continues to contract, innovation and new initiatives can be squeezed out. But creative thinking is more necessary now than ever. So how do you maximise you team's creativity? Kudi's **Dinah Lammiman** presents some tips to help you realise your creative potential...

In other parts of the media world – film, TV and even business, structured creativity has been a regular part of the innovative process for some time. The games industry may be a little behind the curve, but we're beginning to realise its value. Coming up with and developing good ideas is a learnt skill, you don't have to be born with it. With a little bit of training it becomes second nature.

HERE ARE TEN IDEAS TO RECHARGE YOUR CREATIVE HABIT

1. Go wild

Don't start by thinking about what's possible, what the publisher wants or whether it can be done. Those are concerns for further along the development line. Crazy, wacky, apparently completely unworkable or just plain weird ideas are the best starting place for being original.

"*SingStar* began life as a game idea about aboriginal dreamtime", says Jamie Macdonald, former vice president of development at SCE and now senior vice president at Codemasters. 'The central mechanic involved singing to trees in a forest."

"We realised we needed the technology to identify pitch and rhythm. In the end we weren't sure the market was ready for a game about aboriginal dreamtime but by that stage we'd developed a neat bit of technology. Then we thought – we've got this, can we use it in a different way?' And so came *SingStar*."

2. Learn to think laterally

James Dyson famously spent ten years developing phenomenal power for his revolutionary vacuum cleaner. But what else could he use that technology for? What if you turn the one thing you know to be true about a vacuum cleaner on its head.

Redirect its incredible sucking power and make it blow. It not might be much use for a vacuum cleaner but it could be perfect for drying hands quickly. So Dyson was on to yet another revolutionary product – the Dyson Airblade hand dryer.

3. Don't stamp on ideas too early

Those that start out wild are often the best ones but you need to run with them, explore the possibilities fully before you choose which to stick with. If singing to the trees had been chucked out as a downright loopy idea (which, some might say, would be a fair comment), *SingStar* would never have been born.

4. Give yourself constraints

Too much freedom can paralyse innovation. There's nothing more intimidating than being told to go off and be creative. Some hours later you find yourself with a blank sheet of paper facing you, waiting for that great idea to turn up. Putting in some real or imagined constraints can help focus your thoughts.

> ***"Provoke yourself and your team. Take risks. Ignore good judgment. Be silly and extreme, especially if it's not in your nature to do so."***
>
> Dinah Lammiman, Kudi

Talking to *Develop* recently, Honeyslug producer, Mark Inman, described how their small budgets and lo-fi nature of the studio helped them produce claymation-styled puzzler *Kahoots*, one of the consistently highest rated games of the new PSP minis: "We've found that it's actually no harder to charm someone with a game, make them laugh even, on a shoestring budget. In fact, it's possibly easier, because the limitations seem to make us more creative.

"This was definitely the case with *Kahoots*, where we had an art budget of £35, and bought all kinds of stuff from Kentish Town high street to scan or photograph, made characters from plasticine and wool, and drew the interface with felt tips."

5. Be prepared to be a little uncomfortable

Creativity relies on breaking out of accepted ways of thinking and operating. Provoke yourself and your team. Take risks. Ignore good judgment. Be silly and extreme, especially if it's not in your nature to do so.

6. Failure is OK. It might even be a good thing

Most managers stop short of encouraging failure but James Dyson suggests failure is where true originality springs from. Dyson made 5,127 prototypes of his vacuum before I got it right. Failure is a necessary part of process. It's management's job to ensure there is the capability to recover built into the team culture.

7. Use outsiders' experience

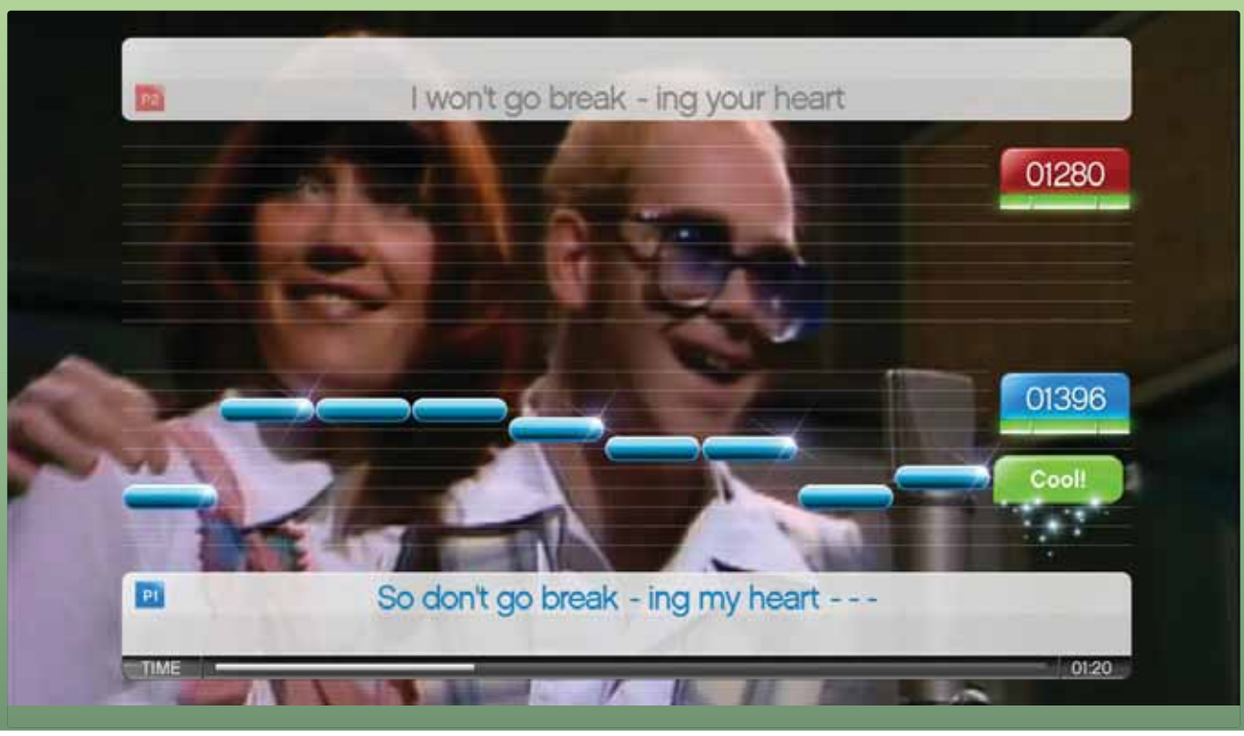
It's easy to be blinkered by familiarity. Refresh your thinking by changing the perspective.

While watching a Formula One race, Dr Allan Goldman and his colleague Martin Elliott realised the pitstop team's smooth functioning could help them solve a problem. As head of paediatric cardiac intensive care at Great Ormond Street Hospital, Dr Goldman's concern had been improving the critical post-op handover from the theatre to the intensive care team.

"We spoke to the F1 teams about the processes and safety culture and designed a simple process we could use," says Goldman.

At Sony Jamie Macdonald found bringing in outsiders to work with a team led to new

Below: Honeyslug's PSP downlaod Kahoots was designed through constraints as much as with creative freedom



Unbridaled creativity, silliness and lateral thinking could help you design the next SingStar (Right), or Dyson Airblade (below)

dynamics and new ideas: "Outsiders can break down internal barriers and draw out contributions from individuals from whatever discipline that wouldn't normally have the opportunity to voice their idea."

8. Establish an ego-less exchange of ideas and comments

Ideally get in there right at the beginning – and then follow it through. When Kumar Jacob was director of HR at Criterion, he and Fiona Sperry, VP of games development, wanted new staff to understand their ideas were just as relevant to Criterion's culture as their longer standing colleagues'. So, at the induction sessions, they surprised the newcomers by asking what they liked about their previous company.

"It worked on several levels" clarifies Jacob. "It was a novel approach. The new intake felt listened to – and the good ideas they suggested were acted on. Sometimes immediately."

On one occasion, while the session was still going on, Jacob and Sperry discussed and then implemented one of the new recruits' suggestions during the coffee break.

"It showed them what a dynamic company they were joining," adds Jacob.

9. Do something different

Mix it up. Try doing something entirely different – cooking classes or drumming workshops – and see how it refreshes your team's thinking.

10. Introduce some structure

Structured creativity is about repeatable effective, idea generation.

At SCE Macdonald found in each team there would typically be one member who was considered the visionary. " That's not a bad thing but you need the process and creative structure to maximise their vision. Structuring creativity is about demythologising the creative process and bringing it into line with other parts of the business. All have a process and a technical infrastructure. This is no different."

Smart people, working within a creative framework maximises the collective IQ. For Macdonald, the introduction of a structure enabled a quick and effective response to changing circumstances: "One week one team might need to respond to short term market opportunity next week it would be a long term product strategy. We would use the same overarching structure and process for both."

Embedding the creative structure into the company means senior management has more freedom. Responding to changing circumstances is no longer a problem because the team has the mindset to deal with it.

Gamers are ready for more sophistication and more innovation. Your audience is becoming more demanding.

Commenting on the critical and commercial success of *Heavy Rain* in the Guardian recently Quantic Dream's David Cage said it was time for the games industry to understand that gamers had changed: "The commercial success of the game shows one thing: gamers are not who we thought they are. They are older, eager for something new, ready for more sophistication than what most games have to offer."

Innovate and stay ahead. To quote David Ogilvy, who is arguably the father of contemporary advertising: "Encourage innovation. Change is our lifeblood, stagnation our death knell."

Dinah Lammiman worked as development producer, reporter and series producer at the BBC for many years. She and Joanna Irlam, formerly of Criterion, set up Kudi earlier this year to provide tailor-made specialist training packages and creativity training for leading companies in both the games and media industries.
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Jade's Empire

Ubisoft's £500m Toronto studio will take the publisher's Canadian workforce close to the 3,000 mark. **Rob Crossley** sits down with managing director Jade Raymond to discuss the mass effect it will have on the region, and the industry as a whole…

Ubisoft's bold new Toronto studio is both buzzing and bleak. It is bright, dark, warm, cold, cosy, empty, vibrant and derelict. It is near-guaranteed to become one of the most influential development hubs in the world. But today it is a skimpy enterprise.

Ubisoft has invested £312 million – along with a generous £164 million bonus from the Ontario government – to ensure Toronto becomes one of the largest studios in the world. Yet today the multistorey complex inhabits about fifty staff – seven per cent of the building's estimated capacity.

As a testament to the sheer size of the Toronto complex, some areas are littered with enough developers to remind that the studio has already started work on two separate projects.

The red-bricked ex-factory, with its grand windows and skylights, is dotted with motley arrangements of colourful desk furniture, multi-monitor PC rigs, trendy artwork and developers at their battle stations. Other rooms are more like office chasms, vast and empty aside from the stripped walls and load-bearing pillars.

"We have a lot of space at the moment," says the studio's new managing director Jade Raymond. "We want to hold 800 developers in Toronto within ten years' time, but right now we have 45 staff [laughs], so it's a proper start-up at the moment."

Raymond's insistence on calling Toronto a start-up is another of the studio's many peculiarities. This isn't a studio that dreams of becoming huge, this is a development house already lined and bankrolled to do so.

To a point, Raymond agrees that Toronto isn't quite like the traditional start-up. "We have all that great stuff but much less of the risk, because we're fully backed by Ubisoft and already have veteran staff," she says.

> ***"If developers have ambition to make triple-A projects, and want to have their place in what is a thriving start-up, the Ubisoft Toronto is the place for them."***
>
> Jade Raymond, Ubisoft

"The biggest draw we have is all the great things about a start-up; we want to grow to 800 staff in ten years, we're on two major projects now, eventually we'll be working on five."

Raymond had previously raised eyebrows when declaring Toronto will be a studio with the exclusive purpose of making triple-A games. But five at the same time?

"Well I can't say specifics now, we don't want to get ahead of ourselves in our first year. But yeah, that's the plan," she says.

"If developers have ambition to make triple-A projects, and want to have their place in what is a thriving start-up, the Ubisoft Toronto is the place for them."

'Start-up' or not, Toronto appears to be the definitive, final solution in Ubisoft's fearsome expansion into Canada.

BIZARRE INC

With studios also in Quebec and Vancouver, Ubisoft is aiming to employ some 3,000 game developers within a single country – surely a national and global record. And though the ambition here is of a bizarre enormity, perhaps Ubisoft's plan to plunder Canada's workforce is a inevitability. Perhaps it is foretoken to how the dev sector will naturally adapt to a mushroomed market and its impossibly escalating demands for quality.

"The bottom line is the way we are developing games today is changing." Raymond says.

"Games are growing into huge-scale triple-A projects. If you look at any big brand like *GTA*, the games are being done across multiple studios and multiple teams," adds the studio managing director.

Raymond is snappish, yet confident. She has a fierce, commanding presence that is often forgotten in the face of her unavoidably

Above: Jade Raymond has ambitious plans for Ubisoft's newly formed Toronto studio, which is working on the next Splinter Cell

Raymond and her colleagues hope Ubisoft Toronto will quickly become the hive of activity that the firm's Montreal Studio (pictured above) already is today

renowned good looks. Naturally, she has great belief in the new Toronto studio – particularly when *Develop* suggests it could capture all the local talent and effectively create a vacuum within the region's thriving indie scene.

"Obviously there are people [within Toronto] who want to work on bigger triple-A projects, and now that we're in the area they're going to be sending in their CVs. I can't say to you that's not going to happen, and I can't say that hasn't happened a little bit already.

"[But] developers have the choice, but if they want to work on triple-A titles they'll probably want to come to us. In the long term though, once a city is known for its masses of game developers, it attracts more and more developers, because it makes moving there a great deal more interesting.

"It allows developers to say 'Oh well if it doesn't work out with that studio I have options to join nearby studios'. So ultimately I think we're helping the whole game development population there."

> ***"Once a city is known for its masses of game developers, it attracts more and more developers, because it makes moving there a great deal more interesting."***
>
> Jade Raymond, Ubisoft

Perhaps the local indie bosses can relax for now; Ubisoft Toronto is certainly in no hurry to expand. The plan, as Raymond explains, is to carefully construct foundations for long-term future growth.

TRIPLE THREAT

"We're setting up a three-prong strategy," she says. "First, we want Toronto to become the best place to fast-track your career, and secondly, we want to ship great triple-A projects from the get-go."

Those 50 staff that inhabit Ubisoft Toronto already – many of them the core Montreal team – will be mentoring hundreds of young, aspiring apprentices that join the company.

The plan is that when those apprentices become masters of their craft, they in turn will mentor the next breed. All the studio needs to do is attract masses of developers, which Raymond is confident will happen.

"I was lucky enough to have a great team of superstars come across from Ubisoft Montreal," she says. "So there is this excellent core team here, which is working on the next *Splinter Cell*.

"Because we are going to be working on triple-A products from the start, we've been able to attract a lot of senior talent as well, and that means we have a good base of people who can be mentors and coach the other people working at the studio."

The chess pieces are in place. Ubisoft Toronto is ready to become a self-sustaining academy that creates some of the biggest games in the world. That's the two most vital elements to the three-prong strategy.

As *Develop's* interview with Raymond comes to its conclusion, the famed Ubisoft staffer is asked about that unknown third element. Her answer encapsulates both the ambition and sense of mystery that still surrounds almost every facet of the new Canadian studio.

"There is a third part to our plan which is looking out to the future," she says. "Toronto is in an interesting strategic position. I can't talk too much about this, but I will say that we have a technology group, and we are building central tech for Ubisoft.

"That's going to be the team that starts looking to the future. Real cutting edge stuff."

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We R the future

We R Interactive might not have released a game yet, but the social video game and online drama specialist is set to make waves across the industry, as **Will Freeman** discovers...

Left to right: We R Interactive founders David Rose, Oli Madgett, Chris Kelly, Tom Thirlwall and Gavin Rowe

Developers get funding from where ever they can. Venture capitalists, publishers and games industry veterans have all put money forward to help new studios find their feet.

Still, when We R Interactive came out of hiding last month, the fact that the new outfit was funded by a collective of television and film industry luminaries meant the studio instantly stood out.

With investment from ITV commercial head Frank Hazlitt, Working Title Films co-chairman Eric Fellner, and advertising expert Peter Mead, We R has bold plans for changing the face of social gaming with title for smartphone and web

Formed by seven veterans of storytelling, film production, branding and games design to capitalise on a new era of multi-disciplinary collaboration, We R Interactive is working intently on bringing together immersive filmed content and 3D interaction in a new way.

But what does that mean in terms of the games the player will enjoy? Company founder and former Eidos development director and Psygnosis studio manger David Rose is the man to answer that question.

"Our games will bring a greater sense of authenticity and immersion," confirms Rose. "For the first time players will feel that they are in the game; not just playing but anticipating the outcome of their decisions and interactions.

"Film captures characterisation and emotion like no other medium. We have strived for years to get close to this using graphics at increasing cost and without ever quite reaching realism. With improvements in bandwidth, dynamic editing and composition of both video and 3D elements we believe that users will benefit from immersive stories where 3D sequences have an integral role in helping tell an emerging narrative they influence."

Born from the growing independent development sector and its habit of refocusing on intelligent game and software design, We R Interactive was founded as a direct response to an apparent lack of risk adverse attitudes from the band of larger publishing houses.

"In harsh economic conditions it feels like there are real opportunities for small groups of intelligent, motivated game developers to make and publish games independently," suggests Rose, who is with his team striving to allow players a never before seen level of control, influence and engagement across multiple platforms.

> ***"In harsh economic conditions it feels like there are real opportunities for small groups of intelligent, motivated game developers."***
>
> David Rose, We R Interactive

Arguably using filmed content is nothing new, and many will point an accusatory digit, highlighting the fact that the less than impressive live action arcade games and filmed Philips CDi titles prove there is little potential in such an approach.

MAD DOG MCCREES AND ENGLISHMEN

However, those finger wavers would be missing a very important point. We R Interactive is doing a lot more that just pasting together footage under a loosely fitting veil of interaction.

It is harnessing a multitude of new technologies and platforms as foundations for narrative journeys that can be personal to each and every user, blurring the lines that traditionally separate the digital and real worlds. A point in the evolution of games that makes the ARG redundant, if you like.

Purporting to use its wildly diverse staff skill set and some mystery shrouded techniques to do wonderful new things, the firm is already encouragingly confident.

"The majority of our staff from the film and game industries are known to us," says Rose, "and therefore we've hit the ground running and managed to create a super creative atmosphere and culture very quickly."

Furthermore, We R Interactive's unique creative approach means it can sidestep some of the traditional development problems all together.

"We avoid the Uncanny Valley problem by using filmed media instead of animated models," offer Rose, as an example.

"Take a look at some of the animation work of Ken Perlin and you can see that the next generation of animators is likely to be using procedural animation where the model is continually active and engaged with its subject and environment. This will change the nature of the problem away from the inanimate but perfectly rendered mannequins and refocus it on what these agents are doing and saying."

Happy to admit the road ahead is one likely to throw up an abundance of challenges, Rose is still confident he and his team will still be turning heads and creating games for social good and education purposes for years to come: "We will strive to be leaders in interactive storytelling and further bringing film and interactive entertainment together. Our focus is original content, and breaking new content to a global audience is our overall aim. The UK remains a source of phenomenal talent, but has been hard hit in recent years; we aim to readdress this," he concludes.

For now, the concrete particulars of We R Interactive's debut remain a near unknown, but one thing is certain; Rose and his colleagues are ones to watch.

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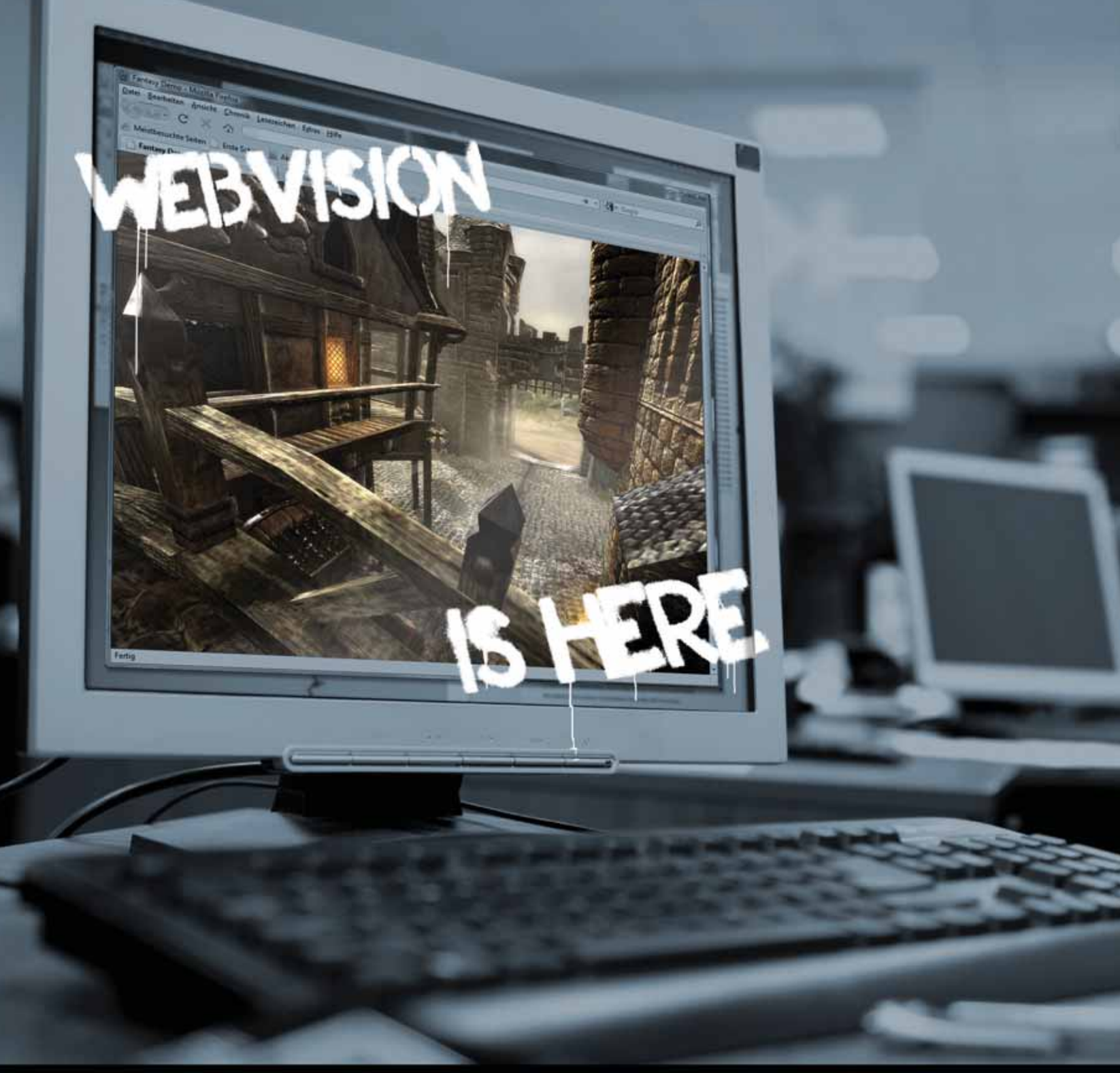

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Welcome to the Golden Age for games development

There has never been a better time to be a game developer, says **Nicholas Lovell**, who in the first in a series of articles for Develop looks at how fortunes have reversed from corporate publishers to small development teams…

Welcome to the second Golden Age of games development. And, wow, is it better than the first one.

The first Golden Age of video games started with the first home video game systems and ended in 1983 in a wave of over-expansion, hubris and the rumoured burial of millions of copies of *E.T.* for the Atari 2600.

Why was it a Golden Age? It depends on whom you ask.

For game creators, it was an era of extraordinary opportunity. New devices allowed new types or artistic expression. A generation of designers were just making art; they were making up the rules of the form itself, because no-one had been there to do it before them. It was a heady, febrile time for games developers.

For people who think business innovation is as exciting as content innovation – and I'm one of them – the Golden Age was even more exciting. Disruptive technologies bring vast opportunities to create brand new companies, business and revenues. Most of the companies that we revere today have their roots in the Golden Age.

THE DAWN OF THE PUBLISHER AGE

The Golden Age eventually came to an end. It was destroyed not by the publisher but by a fundamental truth of twentieth century media: it was expensive to distribute content.

It's not actually expensive to create content. No, really, it isn't. How much does it cost to create a best-selling album? What about a novel? Even a great game (World of Goo cost $120,000; Braid cost $180,000)? Across all of the media industries, the content creators are not the key cost. Distribution is where things get expensive.

At an average newspaper, the editorial cost is less than 15 per cent of total costs. An author will generally get a royalty of less than 10 per cent of the price of her novel. *Modern Warfare 2*, cost $50 million to develop but $200 million to manufacture, market and distribute. And that's not including Activision's corporate overhead.

> ***"Publisher-bashing is an easy option. It's also a deeply unfair one. In the era of physical distribution, publishers deserved to make most of the money."***

Publishing in a physical world is a very challenging activity. The moment that you press the button on the release of a triple-A game (or a book, or a movie or anything else), you are totally committed. That entire development budget is spent. It's sunk. You now have to spend a huge sum on manufacturing and distribution to get that game into stores all across the planet.

Having invested all of that money into a game, it would be terrible if consumers didn't buy it simply because they didn't know about it. So sensible publishers double down by investing a multiple of the dev budget into marketing. And as budgets go up for development and marketing, few companies can afford to participate in this game.

The Publisher Age saw the end of the small independent game creator overseeing everything from the idea to the box in a consumer's hand. The economics didn't stack up. And so, as the twenty-first century dawned, it looked as if the Publisher Age would be upon us for ever.

Luckily, the world changed.

BLOOD-SUCKING LEECHES

Publisher-bashing is an easy option. It's also deeply unfair. In the era of physical distribution, publishers deserved to make most of the money.

It is hard to arrange for all of yesterday's news to be written, subbed, laid-out, printed and distributed to every newsagent in an island of over 60 million people by six in the morning. It's so hard, in fact, that only a limited number of companies could make any profits at all trying to do it.

It's not so hard to deliver that news online, and to do it instantly.

It's hard to manage a transmission network of broadcast towers and repeaters to deliver television county to an entire nation.

It's also not so difficult to upload content to sites like YouTube.

It used to be hard to get a game into a consumer's hand. You had to manufacture it. You had to distribute it. You had to persuade GAME and their equivalents in every country in the world to stock it and promote it.

Distribution used to be both very hard and very expensive to do right. It was so difficult, and so risky, that publishers could, and frequently did, take around 80 per cent of the revenue from titles – and even more of the profits – on the games that they financed, marketed and distributed.

And you know what, I'm not sure that was unfair. They did something that was difficult. Something that no developer could do for themselves. They added value.

Those days are changing. Publishers were not blood-sucking leeches when they did something special.

It's just that with the arrival of the internet, what used to be very difficult is now much, much easier.

REACHING A GLOBAL FOOTPRINT

The Internet has made reaching a global audience possible for anyone. A developer can have a global footprint overnight via XBLA, PSN, Steam, iPhone, Facebook, its own website and a bunch of other routes.

But just because you can reach an audience, doesn't mean that it's easy to do so. Or even that you should try. There are still many occasions when a publisher not only adds value, they are the only sensible way for a developer to bring their game to market, especially if it's a triple-A title.

But the arrival, or perhaps more accurately, the increasing maturity, of the internet has permanently changed the relationship between publishers and developers

OUTSOURCING TO PUBLISHERS

I would like all of you – every person reading this – to take a deep breath and prepare to flip your perspective. Imagine you are looking at an MC Escher painting and where before you only saw black demons, surrounded by empty white space, you are about to see white angels surrounded by black space.

Now change your perspective: "Publishers don't outsource development to the developers; developers outsource publishing to the publishers."

> ***"Pubishers were not blood-sucking leeches when they did something special. It's just that with the arrival of the internet, what was difficult is now much, much easier."***

By flipping the publisher/developer relationship on its head, I hope to help you - the global development community - realise that you have a choice. You can choose who should fulfill the key roles of the publisher: sales, marketing, distribution, and finance.

They can be done either by you or by the publisher. They can also be outsourced to agencies, contractors or freelancers. They can be performed by a platform holder like Sony, Microsoft or like Apple. But they really do have to be done.

All developers need to understand these core commercial functions to run a successful business - even one that doesn't self-publish.

If you are going to self-publish, it's absolutely critical that you understand them. After all, you wouldn't outsource your asset creation or motion capture without a pretty good understanding not only of what was involved, but what you wanted to get back.

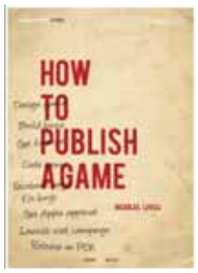
HOW TO PUBLISH A GAME

Over the next couple of issues, and more frequently on developmag.com, I will be giving you a crash course into the four key elements of publishing a game successfully. My focus will be on digital distribution, building a long-term community and increasing your profits.

In short, I'm going to help you to take back publishing control.

There has never been a better time to be a game developer. Now go, make games, and come back next month to find out more.

Nicholas Lovell is the author of How to Publish a Game. A former investment banker and web entrepreneur, he has been involved in the games industry since 1996. He also writes about the business of games at www.gamesbrief.com and advises a number of games and media companies on strategy and self-publishing. **www.nicholaslovell.com**



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THE LATEST TOOLS NEWS, TECH UPDATES & TUTORIALS

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Animation grows up

Ninja Theory and Codemasters on NaturalMotion's morpheme tech

EPIC DIARIES: HOW UE3 CHANGED TRANSFORMERS P76

A frame of mind

Having recently signed deals with Codemasters and Ninja Theory, NaturalMotion is leading a new drive to give animators the tools and recognition they deserve. However, as **Will Freeman** discovers, there's lots of work still to do…

Above from top: Ninja Theory's Mike Ball, NaturalMotion's Torsten Reil and Codemasters' Daven Coburn

Such is the public's obsession with photorealism in games, that for years the output of animators has struggled for recognition. Quite simply, it's a matter of the static image.

Good graphics translate into good screenshots, which are a means for high sales; a fact that has made graphic artists the darlings of publisher, PR and press. Meanwhile, the animator's craft is one that only really shines in motion.

Subsequently, across the industry animation has become seen as the lesser sibling of graphics, and relatively speaking, has been underrepresented by investment and technology.

SEA CHANGE

Thankfully, the tide is changing, and an increasingly sizeable body of middleware is championing the plight of the animator. One of the companies at the forefront of that drive is NaturalMotion, which offers a number of tools, including the graphically-authorable animation engine Morpheme.

"Animation has grown in importance over the past few years," suggests NaturalMotion's CEO Torsten Reil. "A major reason for this is that animation quality had fallen behind rendering fidelity. Whilst a lot of developer attention was spent on how to exploit better graphics hardware, less was spent on how to make characters move naturally. This has resulted in an obvious visual disconnect."

Part of the problem, argues Reil, is that bolstered computing power alone won't improve animation quality. Advancements in authoring tools and new types of algorithms are perhaps just as important, which require a great deal of time and investment.

"In general, the animation problem is not solved," declares Reil. "Apart from some notable exceptions, most game characters move awkwardly, which really takes away from the experience. In addition, the old animation playback approach fundamentally limits how interactive and surprising a game can be. When these shackles are removed, the game experience moves to a completely new level, as titles like *GTA IV* and *Red Dead Redemption* clearly demonstrate."

NaturalMotion's frank recognition of the realities in the animation sector today is

> ***"When animation shackles are removed, game experiences move to a completely new level, as titles like Red Dead Redemption demonstrate."***

undoubtedly part of its success. In recent months the Morpheme engine – which consists of a runtime animation engine and a powerful 3D authoring application for animators – has recently been adopted by two more UK studios readying the launch of a high profile title each.

Ninja Theory has selected the solution for its Alex Garland-penned tactical adventure game *Enslaved*, while Codemasters Studios Guildford is embracing Morpheme for use on new shooter *Bodycount*.

It's perhaps little coincidence that both studios also recognise the conundrum facing the contemporary animation sector.

"I think animation in games overall needs further progression to help it stand out," suggests Daven Coburn, Codemasters' animations supervisor. He says the point when the first round of last-generation sports titles started to use motion capture properly as an example of a rare milestone for character movement and realism.

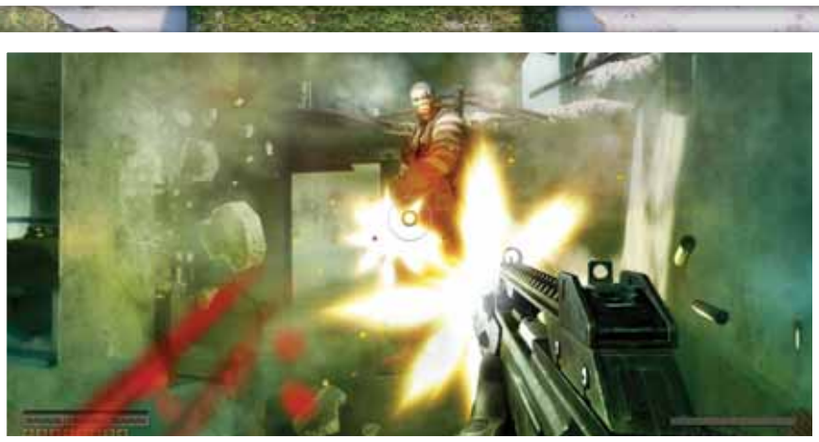
"Since then the progression hasn't had a big leap forward. Aside from technical advances the industry needs to stop thinking that it's just a video game – and therefore animations are expected to slip, slide, and pop – and that it won't matter as long as the game is fun, but instead understand that creating triple-A titles means all areas are done to a high quality."

SET IN MOTION

Over in the Ninja Theory camp, 'chief technical ninja' and company co-founder Mike Ball is equally aware that animation as a discipline suffers from something of a contradiction of recognition.

"I think that generally everyone is aware of how important animation is to a project," states Ball, adding: "However, whilst reviews may score things like graphics and gameplay they don't specifically rate the animation, which is a shame and a missed opportunity, as I have seen plenty of projects that look truly gorgeous and then the movement of the characters utterly break the illusion."

However, as a staunch supporter of the achievements of animation in games, Ball is also quick to point to the fact that computer animation long ago captured the attention of



Natural Selection

For both Codemasters Studios Guildford and Ninja Theory, the decision to choose Morpheme as an animation studio was relatively clear cut.

"Whilst the animators have the best tools for creating the initial animations, the path to integrate the animations into the game was a long and arduous one," says Mike Ball of the studio he co-founded, Ninja Theory.

"Once it was actually in the game the animators then had little control over the animation blends, timing and animation state changes – all the things critical to ensuring that the in game animation was realistic and more importantly fluid.

"NaturalMotion's Morpheme package offered a solution to this problem by giving the animators complete control over the animation control logic directly within the editor."

Over at Codemasters, it was a matter of selecting software that was both intuitive and supportive of stronger communication between code and animation.

Daven Coburn, Codemasters' animations supervisor explains: "Morpheme stood out as middleware that would enable the animators to follow their workflow and pipelines straight into their game, maintaining the visual quality of the animations while gaining some level of understanding of the limitations required to make them playable."

www.naturalmotion.com

both consumer and industry: "Pixar proved a long time ago that taking a simple object and animating it beautifully well can create an experience that is utterly captivating."

Having identified Morpheme as the best tool to push the potential of their animators, and to put them on a level with their graphic artists (see '*Natural Selection*') both Codemasters Studios Guildford and Ninja Theory began work on their projects, and were quick to reap the benefits of their chosen tech.

According to Ball, Morpheme has quite literally transformed the production pipeline for animating characters in *Enslaved*, providing a common interface for both animators and programmers that still gives those working on lifelike in-game movement a large degree of autonomy.

"For Ninja Theory in particular this has reduced the time required to develop character animation and thus has allowed us to add extra complexity to the movement of the characters so that the fluidity and response of the characters is even better than what we had in our previous projects," explains Ball.

"It gives the animators one more step towards the ability to see and affect the animations in game," adds Coburn. "This is very important as there can be periods when we can't get everything in the actual game.

A COOL CUSTOMER

Two more satisfied customers is hugely important to NaturalMotion, simply because the quality of development talent behind each project can act as a showcase for the Morpheme technology. However, the work with Codemasters and Ninja Theory means more to Reil than an expanded show reel.

From a business development perspective, Morpheme adoption does a great deal more than simply show off the capabilities of the technology. "We continue to learn a lot from working with high-end developers, which gives us invaluable information for future features," says the CEO.

"The deals also reflect a general trend," he adds. "Many of the most capable studios now licence advanced technology for core parts of their game."

Certainly, things are looking up for NaturalMotion, its clients and the animation sector as a whole, but that doesn't mean the future isn't free from hurdles.

> ***"The complexity of animation networks has risen dramatically over recent years, but information on how to build them is very scarce. We can do a lot better."***

One challenge NaturalMotion comes across is the lack of influence of animators on animation-related decisions. While it's clear programmers need to be involved with how animation is authored and executed, Reil and his colleagues have again and again seen games held back by animators not getting what they need to produce the goods.

"Secondly," confirms Reil, "the complexity of animation networks has risen dramatically over recent years, but information on how to build them – both in terms of underlying assets as well as architecture – is very scarce. We can do a lot better in making these general guidelines – tips and tricks – available, NaturalMotion included."

"Video games have often suffered from the problem of having animations that are cyclical or repeated ad-infinitum," adds Ball. "We can create variants, however, even though we use an excellent animation compression system, our characters have more bones to animate than ever and so memory storage is still a big issue for us. Procedural animation systems provide a solution to this."

The future of animation and the related middleware is an exciting one, where procedural, physics-led and AI based animation are set to rise to power.

With high profile clients and a highly regarded animation engine backed up by its euphoria and endorphin dynamic motion synthesis systems, NaturalMotion looks set to continue to be a key player as the sector that is its specialty rapidly accelerates on the heels of animation.

It is the complex nature of that future that makes using NaturalMotion's middleware so important, concludes Reil: "Animation tech has become so advanced that is now difficult and expensive to maintain internal technology that remains cutting edge.

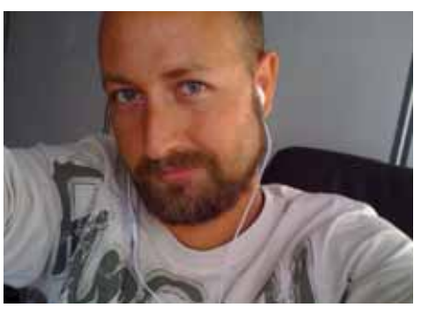
"We have spent millions of pounds on developing production-proven tools, engines and algorithms, and our customers benefit from this investment and experience."

Glance over the fruits of NaturalMotion's client's labour and it's hard to disagree.

KEYRELEASE

ShiVa 3D

In three short years, Stonetrip's ShiVa 3D engine has compiled a 'made-with' catalogue of over 8,000 apps, and now supports a huge array of platforms. With version 1.9 set for release soon, **Stuart Richardson** caught up with Stonetrip CEO Philip Belhasen to chat about walking the straight path to engine success…



Time was, defining a good engine was an easy task. All you had to do was look at the back of the boxes of the biggest games available on supermarket shelves. In many ways this rule still applies, but today those boxes will only give you part of the picture.

Defining 'good' is hard enough anyway. Good for what? Cry Engine 3 can make things look pretty, but what use does a mobile games developer need an integrated vegitation and terrain cover generation system for? Similarly, it's hard to imagine firms like Naughty Dog, Bungie or Quantic Dream ever rushing to make heavy use of the latest iteration of Adobe Flash.

It's a diverse market with many needs, and success can be found providing for any and all of them. Shiva 3D has proved a fine example of this. The engine can and has built games and graphical simulations for the likes of Windows, Linux, iPhone, Android and WebOS, and before version 1.9 is released this summer a product discount has also been given to Mac developers using the engine.

"We don't yet have native Mac support, while we know a lot of developers are using ShiVa 3D with parallels and other emulation software for the Mac," says Stonetrip CEO Philip Belhassen.

"We wanted to level out the playing field so that everyone has the chance to develop with ShiVa."

And as for the upcoming 1.9 iteration, Belhassen is keen to outline what updates are set to appear.

"With the release of ShiVa Editor 1.9, we'll be making a lot of updates including plug-in support for things like Fmod, Allegorithmic and PhysX. There will be a unified authoring tool for all supported platforms; Native Compilation – the editor can now convert Lua to readable C++ code to improve script performance."

"We're also adding the ability to code in C, C++, Cocoa and Objective-C so users can code their game completely or partially inside Lua and custom tags.

> ***"We wanted to level out the playing field so that everyone has the chance to develop with ShiVa."***
>
> Philip Belhassen, Stonetrip

"There's a new Mesh API so the mesh structure can be altered by both Lua and C++ code plug-ins to allow mesh creation and deformation. The ability to export just user generated content will also feature, which is useful if you're developing an add-on for a game."

Even outside of the 1.9 update, Stonetrip is a busy company right now. Belhassen is clearly, and many would say quite rightly, proud of the flurry of activity.

"ShiVa continues to add new platforms and grow as a company. On top of adding Android, iPad, Palm webOS, Wii and PSP support over the past few months, we've also recently added industry veteran John Goodale to the company to grow our business development efforts in North America and Asia," the Stonetrip CEO enthuses.

Belhassen also believes that change is on the way yet again, and that when it comes, Stonetrip will be ready for it.

"There will be more platforms and more interest in self-publishing. I think we'll also see more studios looking to diversify projects by going to six to ten different platforms with a game to spread the costs out, but also hit different and emerging gamers," he theorises.

"Casual games and social games have been very popular lately and we see that trend continuing as well. For engine developers, it's going to be about how well they can service the users of their engine and continually deliver upgrades and enhancements that make development faster and easier, while increasing the quality of the final product."

Stonetrip has come far. Those in the know, know the company. Perhaps the big issue now, for Stonetrip as well as its rivals, is how to generate the kind of exposure the big engines still get from having their names on the boxes of today's big titles. Still, with people like Belhassen on board, you get the impression they'll figure it out.

Licence to Thrill

SHIVA IS ONE OF several big names in 'little' engines. Over the past few years offering top flight tech at affordable prices has become something of an industry trend. Firms like Unity, Vision Engine and the Unreal Engine are all claiming part of this new empire.

For Belhassen, being a part of this group is all well and good, but he stands adamantly by what he sees as an important seperating factor for Stonetrip as well.

"One place where we really stand out is in our licence model," he says.

"We don't charge a royalty, and we don't charge by the platform. If you have a ShiVa licence, you can make as many games as you want on any of the platforms we support. Of course, for Wii and PSP you also need a development licence from first-party, but we do believe we have the best solution for developers looking to create great games on any of the platforms we support."

And so the engine market continues to diversify and expand, and the future of games changes with it. In times like this certainty is in short supply, but Stonetrip in general and Belhassen in particular seem focussed on making sure they are around for a good long while. At this rate, that notion is far from outlandish indeed.

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IGN tools up

With FilePlanet and the GameSpy Technology suite, IGN is attracting the attention of increasing numbers of developers. **Will Freeman** takes a looks at exactly what the company offers today's studios...

Top: The new Medal of Honor, which used FilePlanet, and (above) IGN Entertainment's senior director of consumer products Jill Albin

Such is the success of the IGN's consumer editorially-lead gaming website, that is easy to let the company's other products slip your attention.

As a developer, there's every chance you've heard of the FilePlanet online download platform, and you'll surely be aware of the GameSpy Technology Suite. But what does this duo of products offer, and why should game developers pay them any attention?

To answer that question, let's first take a look at the FilePlanet platform. For your customers, it's an easy to use download service that offers a quite staggering 425,000 files for download. For developers, it offers far more than a simple distribution and marketing channel.

Established in 1999, FilePlanet initially provides a pool of over 35 million registered users, with over five million unique visitors hitting the website each month. Add up those numbers, and the outcome is an sum one to remember; over ten million downloads a month.

On top of that rock solid foundation, FilePlanet offers developers a range of opportunities, from hosting demos, mods and trailers to a comprehensive closed and open beta service (see *Beta It*).

Launched in 2003 with Sony Online Entertainment's *Planetside*, FilePlanet's beta-ing capabilities have attracted titles like *APB*, *LittleBigPlanet*, *World of Warcraft* and the forthcoming return of *Medal of Honor*.

There's also a recently launched hosting and affiliate partnership service for developers and their publishers in the increasingly popular the free-to-play space, which opens up distribution channels to audience of feverish consumers. Already the service has wooed the likes of Sony Online Entertainment, EA and Atari.

THE WAIT IS OVER

"On the technical side, we have the ability to preload a demo to our customers, which means they can sign up for a demo in advance and it will load in the background over time, activating instantly the moment the demo is officially 'live'," explains IGN Entertainment's senior director of consumer products Jill Albin.

"This means that FilePlanet customers aren't waiting to download on release day, but are up and playing immediately. We also host patches for games, including patch notifications and auto-patching, allowing our users a one-stop-shop to make sure that their games are all up to date."

> ***"We provide easy-to-integrate, compelling online services for your games without requiring you to sacrifice your independence or worry."***
>
> Sean Flinn, IGN

Digging deeper below the bonnet of FilePlanet's developer-facing end, a wealth of more intricate features become apparent, including high-end abilities like secure key distribution and validation, bug tracking, NDA and EULA management, consumer email and marketing data collection, segmentation by region for specific tests, distinct consumer selection and affiliate and partner site participation.

For developers, FilePlanet really is more than just a new marketplace; it's a way to test, promote and evaluate your game. There's even ways to tie pre-orders with beta testing via IGN's thriving Direct2Drive digital retail platform, and the chance to harness the marketing potential of the IGN network of consumer sites.

"We've been fortunate to have a team of incredible engineers and operations and IT specialists dedicated to FilePlanet," says Albin of the service's robust reputation. "The platform itself has greatly evolved over the years in response to market needs and feedback from our userbase."

There's more to come too, with the FilePlanet team currently looking at offering developers the ability to help themselves with self-service beta management for smaller-scale beta key distribution, community management and patching programs. The doors are even opening to indie devs and publishers keen to self-publish through FilePanet without having to resort to DRM.

TOGETHER AS ONE

IGN's other lead tech takes a form perhaps more familiar to developers. The GameSpy Technology suite, built on the mantra that 'sharing experiences makes games more fun', includes the essential services that both studios and players have come to expect as standard in any connected game.

That means the platform allows developers to add dedicated server and lobby-based matchmaking, social networking elements and messaging, leaderboards, and online commerce, as well as a host of other features including authentication keys and patching.

And that's not all, says GameSpy Technology's senior product manager Sean Flinn: "It also includes high value services to help developers create deeply engaging experiences that make their games stand out: deep user stats – the ability to track 10s of 1000s of data points for millions of players; cloud data storage – for everything from save games and screenshots to playable content, like game modifications or levels; social push – sharing your experiences with your friends via social networks and services; and team-based gaming – the ability to help build persistent online communities around teams, guilds and clans."

The GameSpy tools are also available across the PC, console and handheld platforms via a common API. And, thanks to in-game and web-based hooks, they allow for an enriching portable game experience.

Titles that harness the power of GameSpy can report gameplay stats to players in-game or on the Web, and can create iPhone apps – or use an iPhone UI Toolkit – to enable

iPhone-to-in-game messaging. You can even maintain and manage your community across a given title's official website.

"We provide easy-to-integrate, compelling online services for your games without requiring you to sacrifice your independence or worry about success at scale," states Flinn, explaining why he believes developers should embrace GameSpy Technology. "Whatever your studio size, whatever your budget, whatever your chosen platform. GameSpy Technology provides a foundation for heroic success," he adds.

HELP IS AT HAND

GameSpy's offering is also about more than just adding multiplayer and community features to your games; the team also provides a rather unique consulting service to help studios envisage and execute far from traditional connected features.

"The GameSpy consulting team's assistance covers everything from feature level customised extensions and add-ons for our core services to entirely new service development," explains Flinn.

"They're really around to ensure that more of the brilliant ideas in a game's design document actually make it into the game," he adds. "In a world of tightening budgets and even tighter delivery schedules, it's tough for dev teams to shepherd the sum total of their vision from inception to execution. Either they find themselves lacking manpower or specialised skill sets that it just doesn't make sense to hire full-time."

Ultimately, explains Flinn, that lack of resource can lead to missing out on scaling out elaborate stats and online competition features, building unique team management elements, or creating unique content sharing and collaboration platforms; all areas where GameSpy can help in its consulting capacity.

GameSpy Technology also endeavours to make developers' lives a great deal easier through integration with a wide range of common tools. That approach has been implemented to negate the need for studios with an established method or technological preference to invest an excess of time in familiarising themselves with new technology and tools.

"If the online services they want or need to use are already integrated into a commonly used engine – like Unreal 3 – or into a user-interface solution – like Scaleform – it saves them time and effort. They can get to the fun stuff, or start innovating on what's already there, that much faster," suggests Flinn.

Claiming to be the only service provider to offer its package on every platform, additionally GameSpy Technology streamlines the process of learning online service APIs for studios looking at multiformat releases or creating several titles simultaneously across different platforms. In short, the IGN tech delivers a rapidly flattening learning curve.

Flinn concludes: "Almost a thousand games of every shape and size have used GameSpy Technology to get online, from indie titles to blockbusters like *Red Dead Redemption*. We handle more players for one title than some service providers handle across all titles. So, if you happen to create the iconic iPad game, we'll make sure that you don't have to worry that your user base has suddenly outstripped your service provider's capacity."

BETA IT

FILEPLANET'S BETA HOSTING CAPABILITY is perhaps the single feature that distinguishes it most from rival online download platforms.

Defining a true beta as a test of key game functionality with consumers that reaches beyond what is possible with basic internal QA, the FilePlanet team hopes to offer input and engagement from core early adopters that studios can easily convert to evangelisers while fine-tuning their game.

"Over the past decade, FilePlanet has hosted the biggest betas since we innovated the concept in 2003 with *PlanetSide*, specialising in secure file and key distribution and extensive, customised promotion to tens to hundreds of thousands of players across FilePlanet and the rest of the IGN networks," explains IGN Entertainment's senior director of consumer products Jill Albin.

"We've also added cross-platform support for the console world. Most importantly, we also have a wide variety of data collection and tracking that we can deliver to developer and publishers both pre- and post-beta that reveals a huge amount of consumer behaviours and feedback."

www.fileplanet.com

WHO SHARES, WINS

ACCORDING TO SEAN FLINN, senior product manager of IGN's GameSpy Technology, the future of game development tech will be defined openness.

"Adopting open standards, sharing gameplay data more openly, and embracing collaboration while rejecting a closed, proprietary world, is the key to a productive, prolific development landscape," argues Flinn.

IGN conceived its ambitous hopes for a collaborative future with nothing more than a simple bit of soul searching.

"A few months ago, we took a broad look at the gaming space in general and asked ourselves: 'What would gaming be like today if its technology and platforms had developed more like the Web?' It would be inherently more collaborative, more innovative, more conducive to sharing – which, according to our bedrock belief, means more fun."

It's hard not to warm to Flinn's vision of the future, and if it becomes a reality, tomorrow's world is one where everybody in the sector is set to reap the benefits.

With firms like IGN already to committed to that prospect, its looking a lot more conceivable than a well meant pipe dream.

www.poweredbygamespy.com

The Testology team cosy up before another day of QA

Testing **time**

Neatly symbolising the growing relevance of the QA and consultancy sector in the global games industry – as well as its expanding presence within it – Testology took away the trophy in the Services category of the 2010 Develop Awards held at the Brighton Hilton Metropole hotel last month.

The firm has had something of a defining year or two up to this point. As well as having provided services for the likes of *LittleBigPlanet*, *Fable 2* and *DJ Hero*, it has been able to boast an expansion of its client list and a continued strong association with the UK tech licensing firm amBX.

An impressive new client has also appeared on Testology's books in the form of Channel 4's education department. Being able to branch out into the educational, social networking and browser-based markets is an oppourtunity that the firm has gladly leaped upon, intent on diversifying expertise on progressive platforms and online mediums.

Departmental growth with this kind of targeted expansion was an inevitability for Testology. With the help of QA manager Justin Amore, the company has set up a compliance department that looks to reflect the success achieved since 2006 in functionality testing.

Having racked up over ten years of industry and development experience, Amore joined the ranks at the after working with the likes of Bullfrog Productions and Sega Europe. His substantial awareness of the compliance process has seen him perfectly placed as the individual to oversee the development of the department, ensuring that the level of quality that Testology look to achieve is translated into the compliance sector. This preservation of quality was something that was seen as very desirable for the firm when assembling a compliance team, as Amore explained to *Develop*.

> ***"We have assembled a compliance team that has a proven track record of getting titles through the submission process first time, on all platforms. We have the ability to make a title as complaint as possible."***
>
> Justin Amore, Testology

"We have assembled a comliance team that has a long, proven track record of getting titles through the submission processfirst time, on all platforms," he explained.

"Testology has an unparalleled reputation for producing functional testing to the highest quality and we aim to maintain this standard in the comliance department. We have the capabilities to make a title as compliant as possible, making us supremely confident that our client's titles will have a strong chance of passing first time. There is no doubt in my mind that Testology will prove to be the industry leader in compliance testing."

COMPLY OR DIE

Testology has, as a firm, structured itself on the idea that complaince testing is a core component of the QA developmental process and is often overlooked when considering this. It is widely recognised that titles will often fail submissions because of insufficient understanding of complaince guidelines and inadequate factoring of them into QA schedules. Testology has sought to acknowledge this possibility, within the QA cycle, and now offers a service that seeks to ensure adequate attention is given.

When referencing the company's compliance department, MD Andy Robson took the time to outline the new services available from Testology: "We offer a full and very comprehensive compliance check on all Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft platforms," he explains.

"We can replicate the platform holders testing environment and are well versed in using all of the required testing tools."

Further outlining his personal faith in the new services his company is offering, Robson outlines an "early-bird" promotional offer that will be coinciding with Testology's latest expansion into compliance QA: "To show how confident we are that excellence is the defining feature of our compliance service, we are offering the first five clients a 25 per cent discount. This is a reduction on an already competitive rate".

A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

As one of the first operational changes to have occured at Testology, the firm hopes that the complaince department will complement the existing functional service that has risen to industry recognition so rapidly.

Amore, who has worked on an impressive number of titles that have passed with first time submissions, recognises the importance of strong candidates when a title can fail over just one bug.

This limited room for error is not something Testology shys away from, however. In fact, the department has made first time passes a central objective in what it refers to as its "pursuit of quality."

Meticulous attention has also been focused on the compliance department's recuitment process, seeking to ensure that the job would be completed as Robson himself would have done it.

"Our interview process is extremely thorough. The importance of recuitment can never be overstated when considering the standards we strive to reach," Robson states.

Testology sees this as an oppourtunity to combine excellence in functionality testing with compliance. The fear of re-submission is something that the firm is striving to ensure will be greatly reduced inside a compliance department that works so consistently towards first time passes.

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VERY SPECIAL EFFECTS

In the second of our extensive extracts from The Art of Uncharted 2, **Develop** looks at the making of the explosive elements in the PS3 action game's intense and impressive action sequences…

NAUGHTY DOG EFFECTS TEAM

DYNAMIC ARTISTS
Michael Fadollone
Eben Cook

PARTICLE ARTISTS
Keith Guerrette
Mike Dudley
Michael Gevorkian

EFFECTS

Naughty Dog's **Mike Hatfield** - Uncharted 2's lead technical artist - on the thinking behind the special effects sequences in Uncharted 2

ONE OF THE THINGS we wanted to improve over *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* was our use of real-time physics-driven events; situations like a character moving through an environment where he's knocking things over, or he's destroying cover with the machine guns.

We really wanted to bring more life to the environments with things that are dangling, or hanging off of the ceiling, that you can bump into and shoot and see them react in real-time. We also wanted to increase our use of pre-simulated physics so if we had a major destruction effect like a building collapsing, we'd pre-simulate all that in Maya, bake all that animation down, and then run that through the game engine. So you'd have real-time control of the player, but the building collapsing is a pre-simulated event.

To push things further we also wanted to layer our real-time physics objects over the pre-simulated events. So in the collapsing building sequence we've also got computer monitors and plants that are rolling around in real-time reacting to the environment.

To add a third layer on top of that, we also added physics-driven particles, so we have sparks that are coming off the light fixtures, that are particles hitting the ground and bouncing. It's pretty amazing that it actually works.

To complete the effect you've got enemies that you're shooting while the building is collapsing, and when they're killed they turn into rag-dolls flopping around the environment. The overall result of all these effects is to overwhelm the player so that they don't really have time to pick it apart and figure out: 'Hey, that's pre-simulated, and that's real-time.' We just want them to get caught up and pulled into the whole experience. All they know is they're controlling Drake and trying to survive.

Our team's brief was 'More awesome! How do we make this more awesome than the first game?'

From an effects viewpoint 'More awesome!' equals bigger effects, and pacing them out so those big effects have more dramatic impact. It also means having more interactive stuff in the environment. The first game had very few physics-driven items so we definitely wanted to have a lot more this time around.

Part of our goals from the very beginning was to have more interactive items, more real-time physics-driven items, and to do away with exploding barrels so we'd find more creative solutions to our gameplay problems. We had to find more creative ways to do the same tricks that we've always been doing.

We 'gate' the player off from area, but that's packaged up in an awesome explosion, and a great dramatic moment finalised by a funny remark from Drake commenting on what he just experienced. All those things are sleight-of-hand distractions for the mechanics of what we're trying to accomplish while moving the player from start to finish.

The Art of Uncharted 2 is a 272-page book showcases the amazing unseen art and ideas that helped make Uncharted 2: Among Thieves one of the most universally and critically acclaimed games ever created. From concept art, to character studies, environment art, character modeling, game art, cinematics, motion-capture, animation, and effects. **WWW.BALLISTICPUBLISHING.COM**

USING HAVOK

WE BROUGHT IN THE Havok physics engine for *Uncharted 2*. Before we had Havok we had our own in-house physics system, developed by one of our programmers, which we used for the first game. It was great, and it worked well, but we were limited in how much we could do with it and how many different features it had, because it was the work of one programmer.

Havok is supported by a huge company, and has been through several revisions, so it made things easier for our artists to use. The Havok system gave us the tools to do things like having a light fixture that's hanging from the ceiling that swings around in real-time, and can react to the player or even gunfire. Havok also gave us some performance improvements so we were able to push more physics objects around in any given frame.

HIND ATTACK

IN THE NEPAL WARZONE, Drake is chased by a Hind attack helicopter. The Hind destroys the bridge Drake is hanging from with machine gun fire, dropping him onto a series of awnings. He then starts running and jumping to avoid the incoming rounds spraying the windows. We got all those windows blowing out with some convincing particle effects.

Drake and Chloe make it to a rooftop garden, so we had a lot of plants in pots and the great thing was that the plants were set up with real-time Havok physics. Not only would they be interactive if the player shot or walked through them, but we could also generate wind that was coming from the helicopter. As the helicopter moves from point to point you can see the direction that the wind is coming from by how it affects the plants. The plants also blow violently when the helicopter hovers.

COLLABORATION

THE GAME DESIGNER WILL have an idea of what they'd like to see in a level, but they need the co-operation of the background artist and the effects artist to make it happen. The designer has overall responsibility for establishing the pacing and making sure that the level as a whole is the experience that they want to deliver. Within that there's a lot of room for conversation and compromise and that is how we end up with well-paced games.

When those moments come, they're fantastic. It's the culmination of a lot of people's great ideas all mixed together. The most satisfying thing about working at Naughty Dog is the collaborative effort. It's not just among artists and designers, but also the programmers. Programmers are more in touch with our technical limitations than anybody else in the team. Artists are pie-in-the-sky people.

We want to see everything. We want high-res textures, and unlimited polygons. The programmers are tethered to reality, but we try to inspire them to find ways to make the technology facilitate these amazing things that we want to do. It's all collaborative, it's all compromise, and then hopefully in the end we come up with something that feels like a win for everybody involved, including the player.

HEAD TO THE LIGHT

IN THE TRAIN WRECK level there's a burning tanker car that you can use as a visual beacon through the blizzard to keep your bearings. As a rule, we keep people headed towards the light. The tanker eventually explodes during the battle and sends a big piece of debris flying through the environment. The explosion blows a cap off the tanker and if that cap happens to hit an enemy, it will kill them. It'll happen every once in a while, and it's really cool to see.

BLOWING THINGS UP

WE DIDN'T HAVE AS many player-initiated large destruction events in *Uncharted 2*, but we did have a lot of destructible cover. When hiding behind a low cover wall while the enemy is shooting, you'll see your cover chipped away bit by bit, eventually taking enough damage to collapse.

That gave our designers a tool to push the player in the direction they wanted them to go, and to create time-constraints for different combat situations. We looked at the story beats to decide when we needed to blow something up, or have a big event like a wall being blown out.

Often, they'd be triggered when Drake gets close, and the blast knocks him off his feet. This takes away control for a second and forces the player to be passive for a moment while Drake collects himself. This gives you chance to evaluate your environment, and decide on your next move.

RUBBLE

ANYTHING THAT GETS DESTROYED requires pretty extensive testing because we have to make sure that any real-time events happen randomly enough to be satisfying. We also have to make sure that it happens in a controlled way that prevents the player from getting stuck.

We blow up a lot of stuff in the game, and then we have to put all that rubble somewhere. If we're going to create a big pile of rubble from something we destroy, we have the testers climb all over that thing and give us all kinds of bugs about wherever they see any collision problems. If any combat has to happen in the vicinity of the debris then it's especially important that we have smooth traversal over that geometry. So we do a lot of testing on the piles of rubble that we create, basically to make sure that we don't break the game and ruin the experience.

BLIZZARD

DRAKE'S TRAIN JOURNEY ENDS when he blows up some gas cylinders and derails the whole train, causing a massive train wreck. There's a blizzard that's rising in intensity over the course of the level. When you start there's just a gentle snow falling, but over the course of the level we're able to dynamically ramp up the intensity of the blizzard so that by the end you're fighting your way through a pretty heavy blizzard with limited visibility.

At one point when you're climbing through these battered train cars, you get up on top of one of them just as another car explodes on the hillside next to you. We call this sequence the 'washing machine' because the explosion sends another car sliding down the hillside which t-bones the car that Drake is standing on top of, knocking him back inside the car, which then tumbles like a washing machine towards the edge of a cliff.

The camera's actually inside the car in this sequence, so you get to see just when the impact happens, and we shatter all the glass. The camera is stationary as the car tumbles around. The camera's inside the car going with it but the car is tumbling and you see Drake flopping around inside the car. Drake gets knocked out for a little while at the end of that. That's just a cool sequence. You're walking, you're looking around, exploring, trying to figure your way out and then all of a sudden 'bam', there's a big explosion and a huge amount of noise and this incredibly violent scene that happens.

CONVOY

IN THE CONVOY LEVEL, we had large rock outcroppings that the vehicles were driving between, so if you hit one of those outcroppings they would collapse. If it collapsed in front of a vehicle, the vehicle would smash into it, so you could take guys out that way. The vehicles themselves turn into physics-driven objects once they get blown up, because we never know exactly where they'll be when they get destroyed. We have to be ready at any time to switch from their predefined animation path to physics-driven behaviour to let them fly into the air and see where they land. That's part of the fun of real-time physics. It's never the same result twice, and you never know when you're going to see something really amusing, like sending a jeep full of guys flying off the side of a cliff and seeing them tumble through the air.

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TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON POWERED BY UNREAL ENGINE 3

High Moon Studios last worked its Hollywood magic with Unreal Engine 3 by introducing Jason Bourne to gamers with *The Bourne Conspiracy*.

The developer recently shipped another game based on a blockbuster film franchise. But rather than turning a book-to-film property into a game, they worked with Hasbro to add a new chapter to the Transformers story.

The *Transformers: War for Cybertron* game is set on the Transformers home planet before the events seen in the recent Paramount Pictures films.

The Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC versions were created using Unreal Engine 3 by a core team of 68 individuals with a support group that totaled 30.

Matt Tieger, game director at High Moon Studios, said having previously shipped *The Bourne Conspiracy* game on Unreal was a huge advantage, as they were able to hit the ground running from the first day.

"Knowing the pipeline allowed us to work smart and fast," added Tieger. "We were also able to iterate on our internal tools for a second game and leverage the work flow speed that has granted us, especially on the art side. We wanted to continue to leverage what we knew and Unreal Engine 3 is a great engine for us to work with for the type of title *Transformers: War for Cybertron* would become – a third-person action shooter."

High Moon used Unreal Kismet for all of its design scripting and utilised Unreal Matinee sequences for in-game cut scenes and animation vignettes.

The team also took advantage of the UE3 framework for multiplayer and co-op gaming, and the technology helped with the creation of the game across multiple platforms as well.

The game environments were built to accommodate both the hulking Transformers and their hidden vehicles. High Moon worked with Hasbro and used UE3 to bring the fantastical world of Cybertron to life with destructible environments.

High Moon also introduced a lot of firsts with the new Transformers game. Players can create their own Transformers and take them online for head-to-head multiplayer combat. Four character classes and an array of customisation options can be used online.

Players can also select from a wide variety of weapons, and customise their skills loadout, with the ability to level up characters and gain new upgrades and attributes in a impressively deep, genuinely rewarding multiplayer experience.

"Gamers are in for something special with multiplayer because the strategies and tactics used are familiar and at the same time unique," said Tieger. "The foundation of the experience is intuitive controls and gameplay modes, but the tactics change surprisingly when you can transform into a vehicle at a whim.

"The other key aspect of our multiplayer is that there are several distinct classes to choose from, each with strengths and weaknesses, as well as character growth as you level up each class."

In addition to the online multiplayer combat, High Moon is introducing some superb co-operative gameplay elements. Never before in a Transformers game have fans had an oppotunity to play with their friends in this way.

The new game offers drop-in and drop-out co-op for the entire campaign game, including all the boss fights.

High Moon Studios has used UE3 to assemble the perfect blend of original action combat for one of the most popular brands out there with *Transformers: War for Cybertron*, allowing fans to explore the home world in an all-new interactive adventure.

Above: Transformers: War for Cybertron harnessing the power of Unreal Engine 3

UPCOMING EPIC ATTENDED EVENTS:

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August 16th to18th, 2010

Gamescom
Cologne, Germany
August 18th to 22nd, 2010

GDC Online
Austin, US
October 5th to 8th, 2010

Please email: mrein@epicgames.com for appointments.

To discuss anything raised in this column or general licensing opportunities for Epic Games' *Unreal* engine, contact: **mrein@epicgames.com**

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Mark Rein is vice president of Epic Games based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Since 1992 Mark has worked on Epic's licensing and publishing deals, business development, public relations, academic relations, marketing and business operations.
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HEARD ABOUT

The Future Of Game Audio Programming

John Broomhall talks to SCEE's Creative Services Group's principal audio programmer, Nicolas Fournel...

Nicolas Fournel has an impressive 20 years' experience developing commercial digital audio software. He started out coding Amiga sample editors in assembler and went on to build audio technology for Factor 5 (including the GameCube SDK audio tools), Konami Hawaii and Electronic Arts, Vancouver before arriving at his current senior position within SCEE's Creative Services Group.

So, how does he see the current and future state of game audio programming?

He says: "A significant focus for me is audio analysis to help create smarter tools, improve audio engines and enhance or even create gameplays," he says. "For example you can analyse the spectral content of your assets and export this information to the game as metadata. When sounds are triggered or modified at runtime, you update the spectral matrix – a representation of the game's overall output in the frequency domain. The audio engine can then make informed decisions: how to dynamically mix the game, to apply (or not) audio shaders to a sound effect based on its audio properties, and so on.

Perceptual voice management is also made possible, supplementing voice priority systems, to decide whether frequency-wise, it's appropriate to start a new sound or not. If there are already ten very low frequency sounds playing on the left you might not want to add more. Remember – audio engines are deaf. They take decisions that impact the whole gaming experience without 'listening'.

"Analysis is also the key to creating higher-level tools. The more your application knows about the data you're manipulating, the better because it can assist with creative choices. Content-aware tools can represent your assets in a meaningful and useful way - for instance, maybe for a debris sound effect what is important is the distribution of the impacts in time and the overall envelope. For a pitched musical instrument it will be the harmonics and the pitch. Audio analysis can be used to extract all kinds of features from amplitude to spectral shapes and more.

"As to enhancing gameplay, an example from my own experience would be when I worked on *Lost In Blue*, a DS game where the player is lost on an island and has to make a fire. You use the stylus to rub wood together onscreen whilst physically blowing into the microphone. In this case, an envelope follower can be used to analyse the incoming audio signal and autocorrelation evaluates if the player might just be saying 'aah' instead of actually blowing. It's a simple example but there's no reason you couldn't have gameplay based on how you clap your hands, whistle, or hit a resonant object."

> ***"Real-time sound generation – voice and sound – is the next big step for game audio. It'd be naïve to say procedural will replace everything, though."***
>
> Nicolas Fournel, SCEE

Fournel is convinced that real-time processing methodology will continue to develop with more content dynamically updated at run-time, believing that talk of audio assets will give way to talk of models of assets. He explains: "Real-time sound generation - including voice and sound effects - is the next big step for game audio. One of the main tasks of a sound designer is creating dynamic content from static sounds. Usually, this is done with scripting and randomisation, and by multiplying the number of assets – but this is still playing static snapshots rather than a truly dynamic model. It would be naïve to say that procedural audio will replace everything though; it won't make sense for all cases. But it's a perfect solution for physics-based sounds – impacts and contacts for example."

All well and good though the industry still faces a shortage of audio programmers. Moreover, Fournel is concerned about hiring the right individuals: "Requirements have evolved significantly. I want to hire audio programmers with synthesis, processing and analysis knowledge. There are enough good game programmers who can stream files and calculate the 3D position of an emitter – now we need people passionate about audio who understand band-limited oscillators, filter design, or the Q-transform – who can invent fresh audio-centric solutions to our problems.

"Hopefully, the industry will attract more people into this discipline. There are really interesting technical challenges. For instance, right now I'm looking at analysing library sound effects to create dynamic models of them so that for procedural audio, the sound designer doesn't have to go to an animal anatomy class to be able to build a bird call model. There's the opportunity to make really rewarding, smart solutions, push back boundaries and realise entirely new ideas."

Above: Nicolas Fournel, principal audio programmer at SCEE's Creative Services Group

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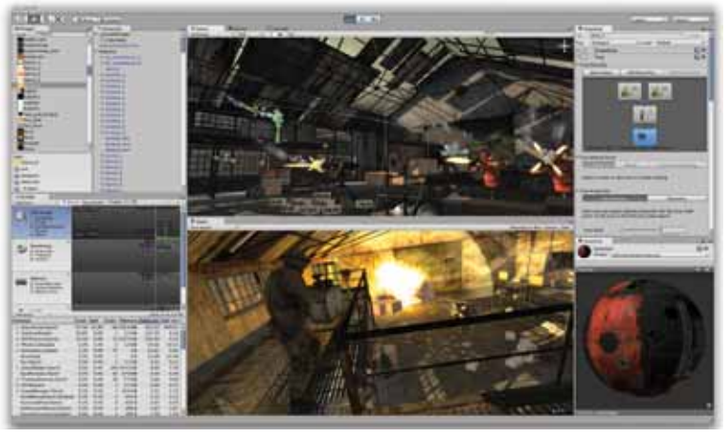
UNITYFOCUS

Unity 3 – What are its developers most proud of?

As the release of the next version of Unity draws ever closer, **Thomas Grové** talks to the tech's dev team about what they have been creating…

Unity 3 is looking to be its creators biggest release to date – bringing with it source-level debugging, deferred rendering, best-in-class lightmapping and occlusion culling, and a unified editor. With the launch nearly at hand, Thomas Grové asked members of the Unity team what features they are most excited about.



Roald Høyer-Hansen,
3D Artist
Beast lightmapping, no doubt. Never has lighting a scene been so much fun. Great interface and superb integration with Unity. It has actually changed the way I work, as I now do all my lightmapping/baking inside Unity, with Beast. I am sure 90 per cent of the games we'll see after 3.0 will look 10 times as good as the ones seen today.

Charles Hinshaw,
Editor Developer
There are big features, but I'm really enjoying the little scene view tweaks that improve daily use. Vertex snapping, look-at rotation, live previews for materials, dragging prefabs into the scene live with ray-snapping, interactive light gizmos, and rect selection — get used to them and then use a 2.x build and see how frustrating it gets. Unity 3 is going to allow for scenes to be constructed much more quickly and accurately.

Aras Pranckevicius,
Code Chef
Personally, I'm quite happy with all the behind the scenes stuff that went into 3.0 rendering – surface shaders, seamless shader compilation into OpenGL ES shading language, the way we encode deferred lighting buffers and so on.

Obscure features that are awesome: XOR operator support in JavaScript. XOR is cool because:

- It's exclusive - very exclusive.
- No short circuiting semantics with this guy.
- It appreciates differences in people, or at least in operands, which is almost the same as people.
- It has an X in it. Everything that has an X in it is cool. And this one starts with an X.

Samantha Kalman,
Senior QA Specialist
I'm most thrilled about the new audio features. Big things like FX filters and reverb zones to add atmosphere to your audio are really awesome, but little details like reliable synching of multiple playing sources are something I think are just completely wonderful.

Combined with spectrum analysis you can do things like procedurally modify colours, meshes, lighting, or anything else based on audio playback.

Nicolaj Schweitz,
Test Specialist
I love the new audio features, especially the possibility to use audio to affect any runtime variable. I can't wait to see what people get out of this. The mod tracker file support might start a new epoch in music for games — or should I say a revival of the demo scene trackers.

I am also amazed by the brilliant new physics features.

Cloth is a powerful feature that along with DSP effects and reverb zones will expand the way our users will present their game worlds.

I am really happy that we have managed to include a lot of details into the mix, audio preview in the scene, object selector, audio rolloff curves, UI for the player settings – I could very easily go on and on.

It soothes my perfectionist heart to see that many minor improvements in Unity.

Rune Skovbo Johansen,
Creative Programmer
A few things that are exciting to me, and haven't been mentioned yet:

- New font back-end and text input with IME support should make Unity far more interesting to developers targeting Asia and other markets that have unique fonts.
- A few very typical basic math functions have been added that you'd need in many games, but which are not trivial for newbies to come up with on their own: MoveTowards (for floats and vectors) RotateTowards (for rotations and vectors), and others.
- Lots of small bug fixes all around that improve stability and performance.
- Full debugging capabilities

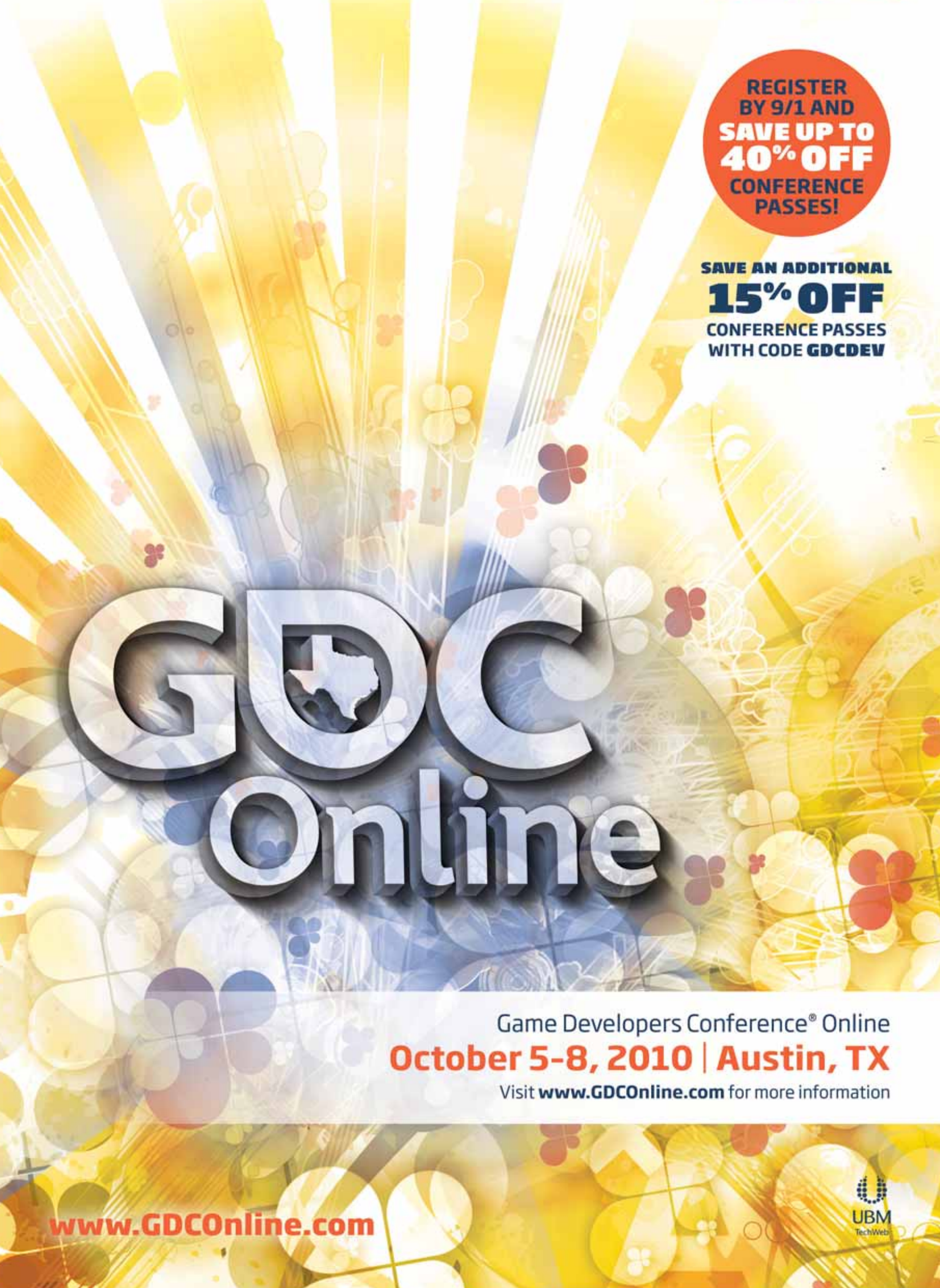
Joachim Ante,
CTO
I think Unity has made the transition to being a robust level editing tool — developers can place modeled objects from inside Unity as opposed to artists creating the whole level in maya/max. You could always use Unity in that way in theory, but there were some drawbacks why people didn't do it workflow-wise and feature-wise when they were doing a high-end production.

There is a bunch of stuff that contributed to it, in order of importance:

1. Being able to lightmap from within Unity itself.
2. Static batching.
3. Being able to place things with the vertex snapping and raycast snapping.
4. Occlusion culling so you can get performance out of big scenes.
5. Being able to quickly find assets with the object picker.
6. Being able to search stuff in a super awesome looking way.

Equally important is the unified editor; we actually managed to get all platforms back under one tool again. This is awesome right now, but we also spent a lot of time making it easier to add new platforms, so that after 3.0 we can add new platforms at the speed of a rocket ship.

To watch video previews of Unity 3's new features, check out **http://unity3d.com/3**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Studio News

This month: CrowdStar, NewsCorp and Ogmento

EXPANSION AT CROWDSTAR GAMES

Top social game studio Crowdstar has announced the appointment of four new members to its executive team.

Pete Hawley, Mike Ouye, Robert Einspruch and Mark Hull join the company that boasts a network of some 50 million casual gamers.

"Mike, Pete, Mark, and Robert share the singular vision of CrowdStar as an agile, creative company gunning to be number one," said the firm's CEO Niren Hiro.

"Their global and entrepreneurial perspective is a perfect match for CrowdStar as we continue to scale with great games that delight our users."

Hawley previously worked for EA as vice president of product development. Before that he led product development for Criterion Games, SCEE and Lionhead. He will take on the role of vice president of product development for Crowdstar.

Hull has been appointed as product marketing and community vice president, following 14 years experience working for firms such as Vivaty, iWin and Yahoo.

Mike Ouye recently worked for rival developer Playdom before joining CrowdStar as monetisation and merchandising VP.

Einspruch, the new business development director, has over 15 years experience in finance, product management and business development, and has worked for the likes of Apple, Amazon and MumboJumbo.

www.crowdstar.com

NEWSCORP HIRES GAMES BOSS

NewsCorp's slow but inevitable move into direct games production continues to gather pace - its digital division has hired a boss for its new games unit.

US online service and social network expert Sean Ryan has become exec vice president and general manager at NewsCorp Digital Games.

He's got a raft of experience at online consulting venires including TAG Strategic and Zeus Research, but also was CEO of virtual avatar firm Meez, acting CEO of LiveJournal, and board member of microtranscaction platform Live Gamer.

Paidcontent reports that Ryan's appointment comes in the wake of NewsCorp's purchasing of small indie social games developer Irata Labs - he will form the new games division around that studio, and also hire more to join his team.

He will report to IGN president Roy Bahat, but the games production and games editorial teams will be kept separate, church and state-style - much in the same way IGN.com is kept at arm's length from subsidiary sites Direct2Drive, GameSpy and GameSpy Technologies.

www.newscorp.com

OGMENTO ADDS THREE

Augmented reality gaming startup Ogmento has announced three new hires to its executive team.

Rick Ernst is taking on the role of the company's new lead game designer, Tim Hernandez joins as its latest director of production, and James Chung becomes the company's newest art director.

All three have long experience in the games industry: Ernst at companies including Looking Glass, Pandemic and Sony Online; Hernandez at EA Mobile's Future Technologies team; and Chung also at EA Mobile, and Infinity Ward.

"We have assembled an amazing team of veterans in the video game industry," says president and chief creative officer Brian Selzer.

"They all understand the unique opportunity ahead of us, and are dedicated to our goal of making innovative AR games a reality."

Ogmento was founded last year, and is working on AR games for platforms including iPhone and Android, but also PC and console.

The company raised $3.5 million in Series A funding back in May of this year, and has already started on work with clients including the likes of Penguin Publishing, SAP, Orange and PBS.

www.ogmento.com

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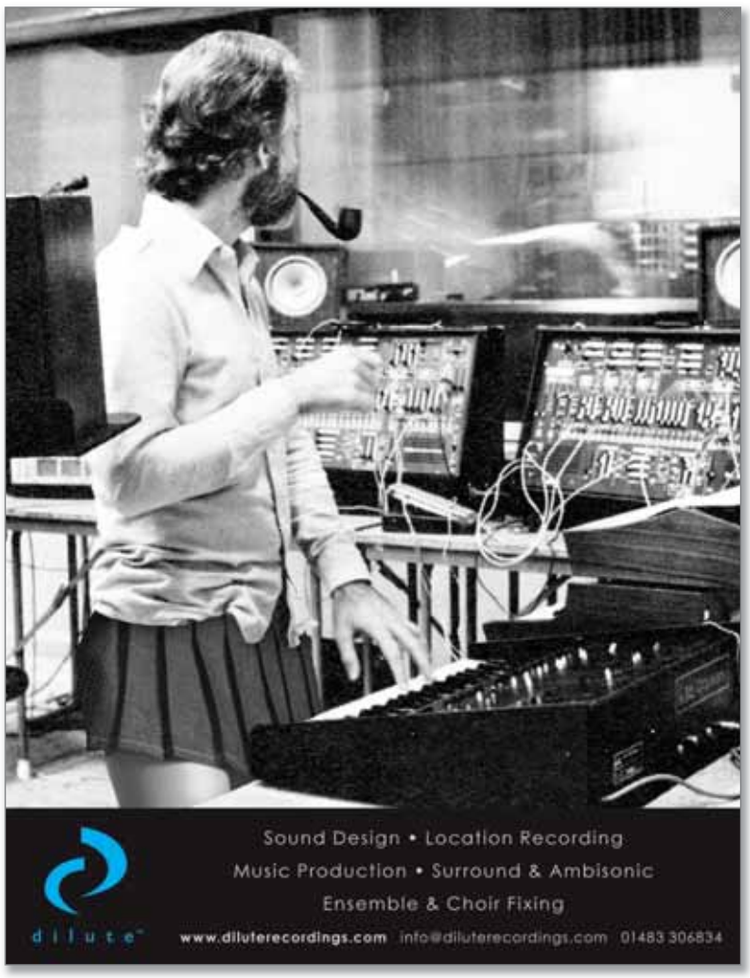
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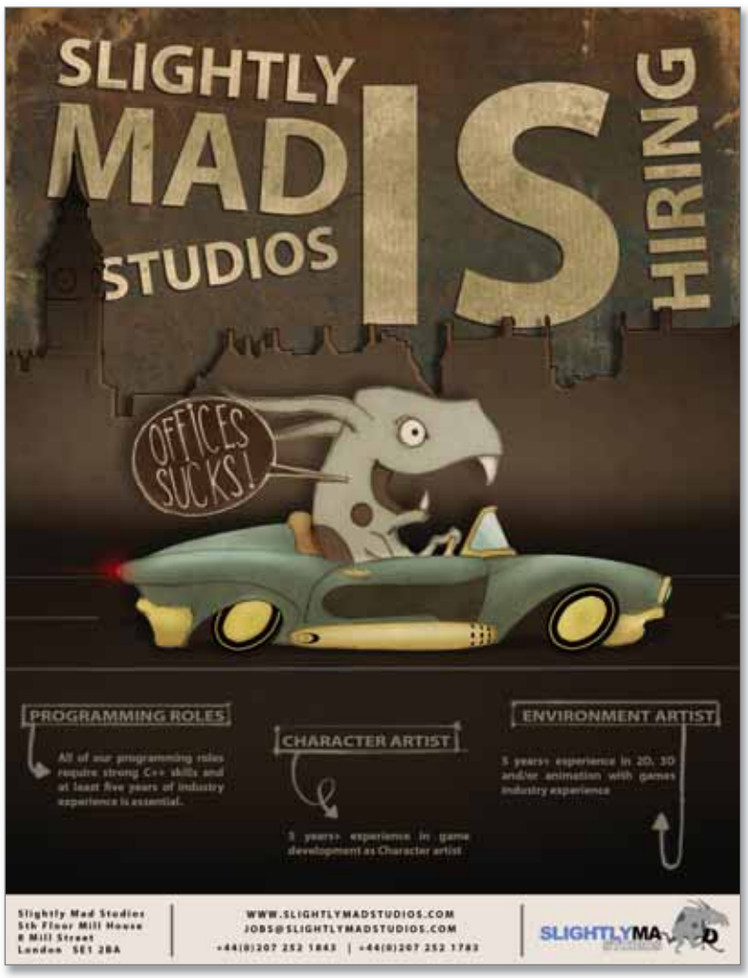
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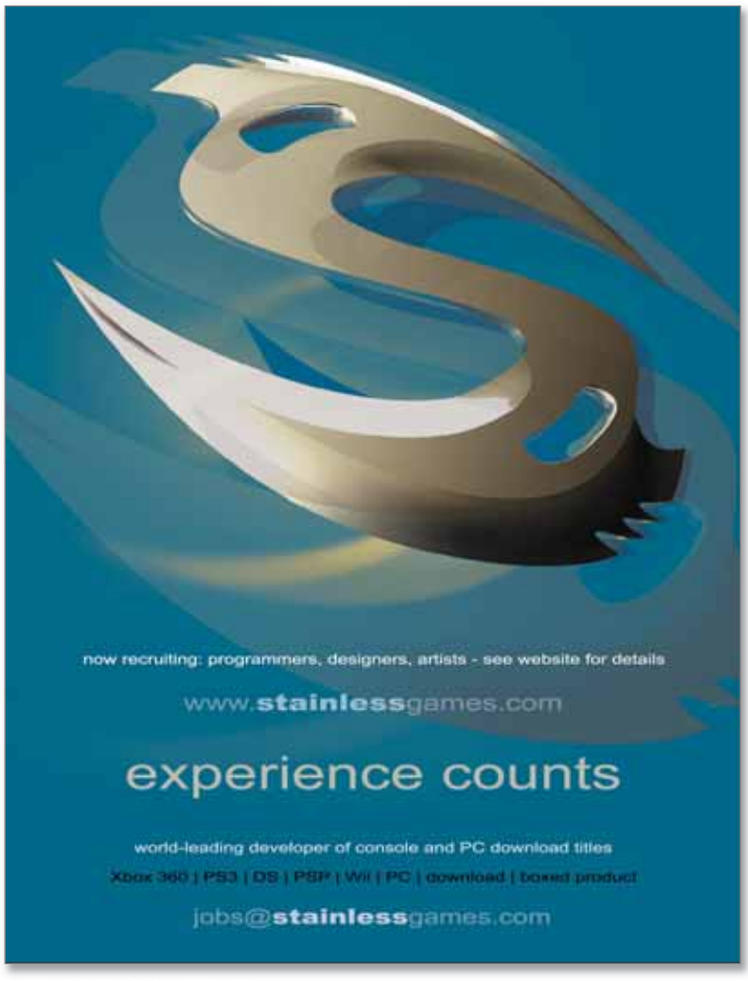
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Studio Spotlight

EPIC GAMES

Epic Games' studio history has been one of almost continuous success. Founded as 'Potomac Computer Systems' in 1991 by Tim Sweeney in Rockville, Maryland, the firm released its popular DOS game creation system *ZZT* the same year.

Since that time the company has gone from strength to strength. After a renaming to Epic MegaGames, the studio released a series of highly-regarded shareware titles like *Epic Pinball*, *Jill of the Jungle* and *One Must Fall: 2097*. Throughout the ninetees Epic also began publishing titles for other studios, one of which was Safari Software, a firm later brought out entirely by Epic MegaGames.

In 1998 the company released *Unreal*, a critically acclaimed FPS that made the name of its first Unreal Engine, the propriatoiry tech series that went on to become a dominant force in engine licencing for many years.

The following year, Epic MegaGames became Epic Games and moved to Cary, North Carolina, from where *Unreal* became a hugely successful game franchise over the following decade. Nine seperate titles had been released by 2007.

In 2006, Epic released *Gears of War*, the first part in what has gone on to become one of the most popular games of the current console generation. The following year it aquired a majority stake in Polish studio People Can Fly. Then, in 2008, Epic aquired Chair Entertainment, and with it developed XBLA title *Shadow Complex* in 2009.

Epic has today opened divisions in China, through which it owns Titan Studios, Korea, and soon will be opening an office in Japan for engine support, technology and later on game development.

The third part of the widely repected *Gears of War* trilogy is currently set for release in April 2011.

Last month, Epic reached what many at *Develop* consider its greatest achievement to date when it picked up the presigious Best Engine gong at the Develop Awards in Brighton for the second time.

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Tools News

This month: Emergent, Raylight and Image Metrics

Emergent Game Technologies has signed six licensing deals for casual and downloadable titles to be powered by its Gamebryo engine.

Fire Hose Games has licensed the engine for upcoming digital download title *Sam Bolt Scrappers*; Tornado Studios is developing an unnamed title for PSN and Xbox Live; Manifest is building a hair styling game called *Busy Scissors* and Virtual Air Guitar Company is developing *Kung-Fu LIVE* for PSN.

Other studios involved in the multiple signings include Perpetual FX, who is developing an unannounced project for PSN and Zivix, building *Jam Party: Be the Music* for PSN, Xbox Live and PC.

"Emergent is pleased that our technologies and flexible licensing model are helping studios meet the extremely short production cycles and scaled budgets of downloadable titles without compromising the features or gameplay," said Katie Morgan, Emergent vice president of sales and marketing.

"The diverse and growing list of studios using our tech for digital titles, on all platforms, illustrates the flexibility and optimized abilities of Gamebryo and LightSpeed for creating casual and digitally downloadable titles."

www.emergent.net

Italian studio Raylight has made its Xrayunwrap 1.5 toolset, the latest iteration in its automatic UV unwrapping plug-in series, available for purchase.

Xrayunwrap is designed specifically as a plug-in for 3ds Max, and features a redesigned interface integrated inside uvw unwrap modifier and Live Unwrap, which Raylight has stated allows users to select edges and see the results in real time.

Xrayunwrap is available for download from Raylight's website, with a discount for users who already own the 1.0 toolset.

"Xrayunwrap comes from continual developments of our internal technology. Throughout this year, we will be actively promoting our technology to existing and aspiring games developers, starting last month with the promotion for our Blueroses 3D mobile engine trial for developers working on the Samsung Bada OS," said Raylight CEO Massi Di Monda.

"Raylight is a founding member of the Italian Videogame Developers association and we are at the forefront of pushing the Italian development community upwards to compete globally, and providing access to our tech helps this cause."

Di Monda was also keen to discuss Raylight's international intentions.

"Raylight is now raising its profile in overseas markets, so it makes sense to offer this technology to everyone. Xrayunwrap has helped Raylight produce higher quality games through shorter production schedules and it is technology of which we're very proud," he said.

www.raylightgames.com

Facial animation tech specialist Image Metrics has aquired avatar creation company CharacterFX.

As part of the deal, the CharacterFX founder John Riggs has joined Image Metrics as director of avatar development.

The CharacterFX offering provides an integrated facial rigging tool-set, which Riggs authoured for Autodesk Maya and 3ds Max. The solution lets developers create character facial rigs using a proprietary automated weighting transfer system conceined to rapidly shift a given character's facial motion, for what promise to be high-level life-like movements.

Image Metrics has acquired CharacterFX with a view to integrate the tool into its popular animation suite Faceware.

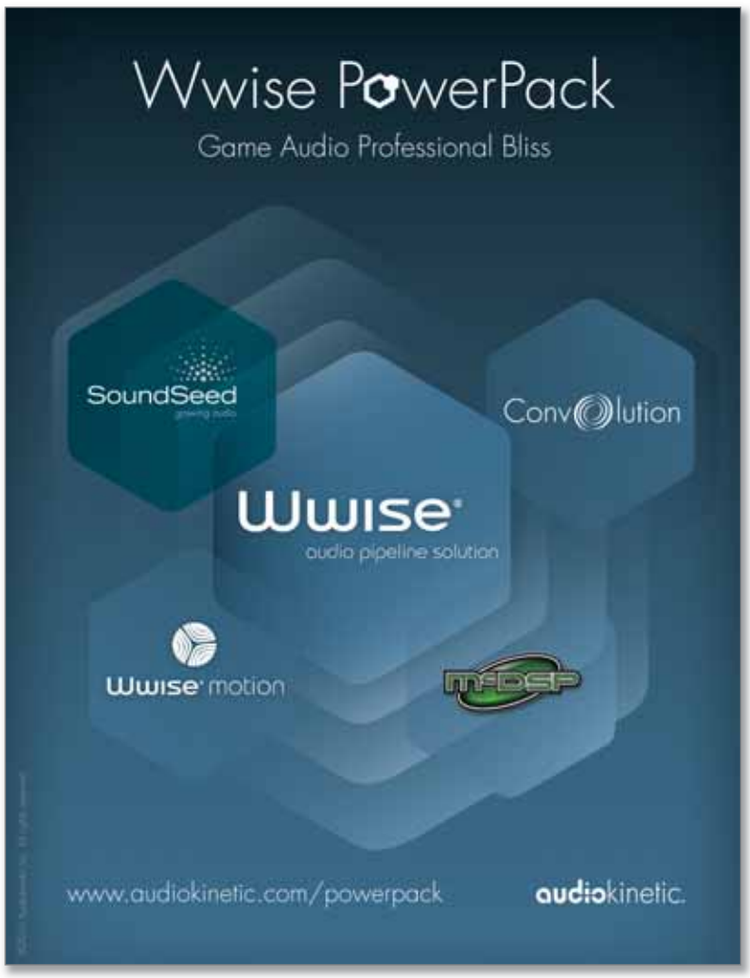
"It takes a great computer-generated character and a great performance driving it to make a scene feel real and believable. To create facial animation that features these elements, Image Metrics has developed a unique technology for capturing the soul of an actor's performance, and the addition of the Character-FX technology will massively accelerate our ability to create and animate great character models," said Michael Starkenburg, Image Metrics' CEO.

Riggs brings with him over 15 years as a 3D animator working in the video game, television and film industries.

Image Metrics and CharacterFX have already worked closely together, in a collaborative advertising project for the National College Basketball Championships.

www.image-metrics.com

Audio Kinetic **www.audiokinetic.com**



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Tool Spotlight

HANSOFT 6.1

TECHNOLOGY: PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Hansoft has released the new 6.1 version of its well-regarded project management tool.

The new version of Hansoft includes extensive support for the lean development technique Kanban, with the ability to handle multiple parallel swimlanes of workflow.

"Kanban is hot in the development community right now and we are proud to introduce, not only the most extensive and easy to use support for Kanban, but also a unique support for Kanbans with multiple swimlanes of workflow," said Hansoft chief development officer Hans Andersson.

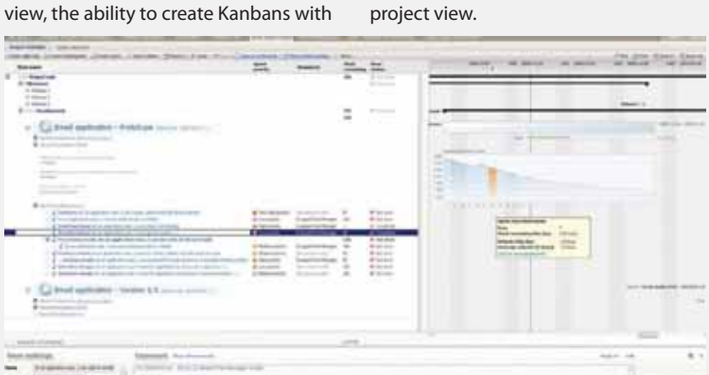
Hansoft 6.1 also features more powerful release and sprint burndowns with graphical metrics for points and ideal days, as well as more extensive XML export and import of data into Hansoft tech.

"Hansoft 6.1 increases visibility on project and program progress and makes forecasting and long term planning easier," Andersson continued.

"The improved export and import functionality makes migration to Hansoft from other tools fast and easy, and you don't have to worry about losing any data in the move."

Major new features in Hansoft 6.1 include Kanban support in the wall view, the ability to create Kanbans with multiple parallel swim lanes. Extensive export to spreadsheet functionality is also featured, allowing exports of all information from Hansoft to xls. XML import and import of data into Hansoft with full support for custom columns features for easy migration from countless other tools.

Release burndown with work remaining, points or ideal days directly in the project schedule are also new, alongside sprint burndowns with support for points, ideal days and graphical comparisons in the main project view.



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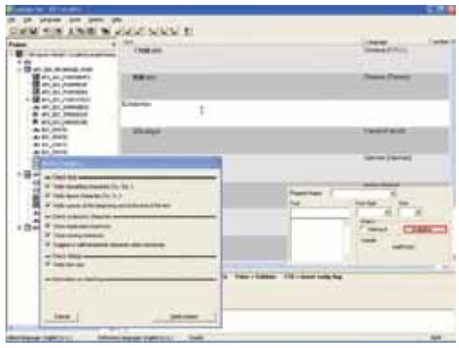
Services News

This month: LocalizeDirect management hiring, Mixamo tech retooling

Michael Souto has been appointed as business development director at localization tool developer LocalizeDirect.

With 15 years game industry experience, ten years of which spent at Eidos and most recently at nDreams, Souto adds a wealth of internal and external development production experience to the LocalizeDirect team.

Perfectly placed to appreciate developer and publisher issues during the localisation phase, he is able to reinforce and promote LocalizeDirect's aim to streamline and de-stress the process.



Christoffer Nilsson, MD of LocalizeDirect said: "Whilst at Eidos, Michael produced 18 titles resulting in 160 localised releases. He's gone through localisation so many times from both publisher and developer perspective so instantly knows the pain experienced first-hand. This is key. We want clients to understand that not only can we negate the cause of localisation problems but we also understand what these problems can do to a team under pressure."

Michael is based in London and is responsible for developing working relationships with existing and prospective LocalizeDirect customers and partners. He will also be responsible for developing strategies for attracting new clients and promoting service enhancements across the board.

www.localizedirect.com

Web-based animation service Mixamo has retooled its 3D character tech to enhance character customisation.

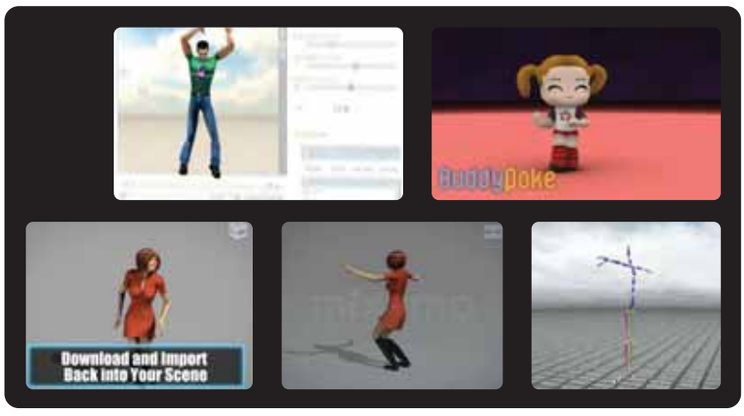
Using the tech, developers can go online to create fully-rigged characters for their projects in as quickly as a few minutes. A full range of Mixamo animations can be applied to each character in real-time, and if the developer likes the result, the model can be bought and downloaded.

Mixamo co-founder Stefano Corazza says the service provides an alternative to manually rigging characters for different levels of detail or resolutions.

"With our Custom Character Creator suite, users now have a great complement to our character upload and mapping feature," Corazza added. "And any characters created work seamlessly with all of our motions using Mixamo's automatic, real-time retargeting system."

Mixamo says its range of characters are used in numerous capacities, from characters to NPCs, cut-scenes, animated shorts and even 3D storyboarding. Both 'standard' and 'pro' characters are available, each at different costs and varied levels of detail.

www.mixamo.com



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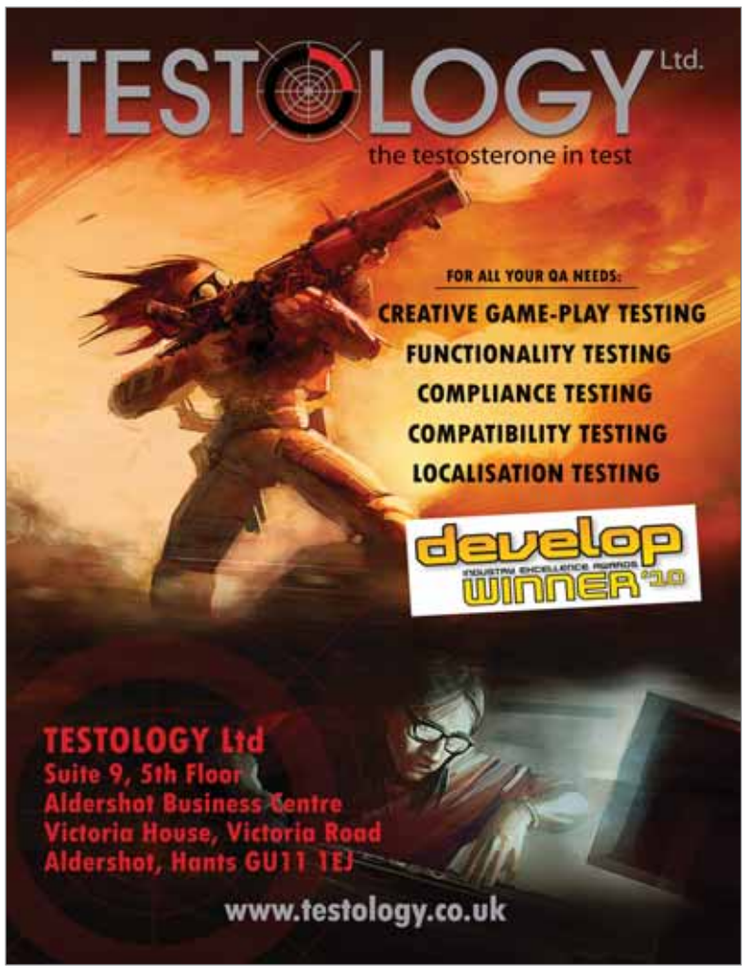

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Training News

Escape Studios gets a makeover to match global ambitions…

Escape Studios has unveiled a new brand identity and a highly sophisticated new website to support its expansion internationally. The makeover reflects Escape Studios' global ambitions, as it prepares to open its first overseas branch in the USA. Meanwhile its new website harnesses the latest social media and collaboration technologies, to ensure the Escape Studios learning experience is faithfully reproduced for students of its distance learning courses.

Escape Studios' new website boasts an enhanced e-learning engine to support closer collaboration between students and tutors. The platform fully integrates with social networking channels like Facebook and Twitter, enabling students to collaborate and share information with their peers. The secure e-learning site also encourages students to submit assignments for grading, communicate directly with tutors, and work together with friends on projects.

Dominic Davenport, CEO at Escape Studios said: "This is an exciting time for Escape Studios as we look to replicate the success we've achieved in the UK globally. We believe our new identity and the technical innovations in our online learning system will help those wishing to build a career in the CG industry, and set the bar for CG talent – both in the UK and worldwide."

www.escapestudios.com

Search for a Star 2010 winner collects award

Search for a Star winner Pieter Botha picked up his trophy at the Develop Industry Excellence Awards in Brighton's Hilton Metropole hotel last month.

Pieter, who is currently finishing his degree in Computer Games Design and Development at Queens University Belfast, said he was very happy to have received the award.

"This feels like a dream come true," he said.

"I feel like I have now been given a proper chance at getting my dream job in the games industry."

www.aswift.com

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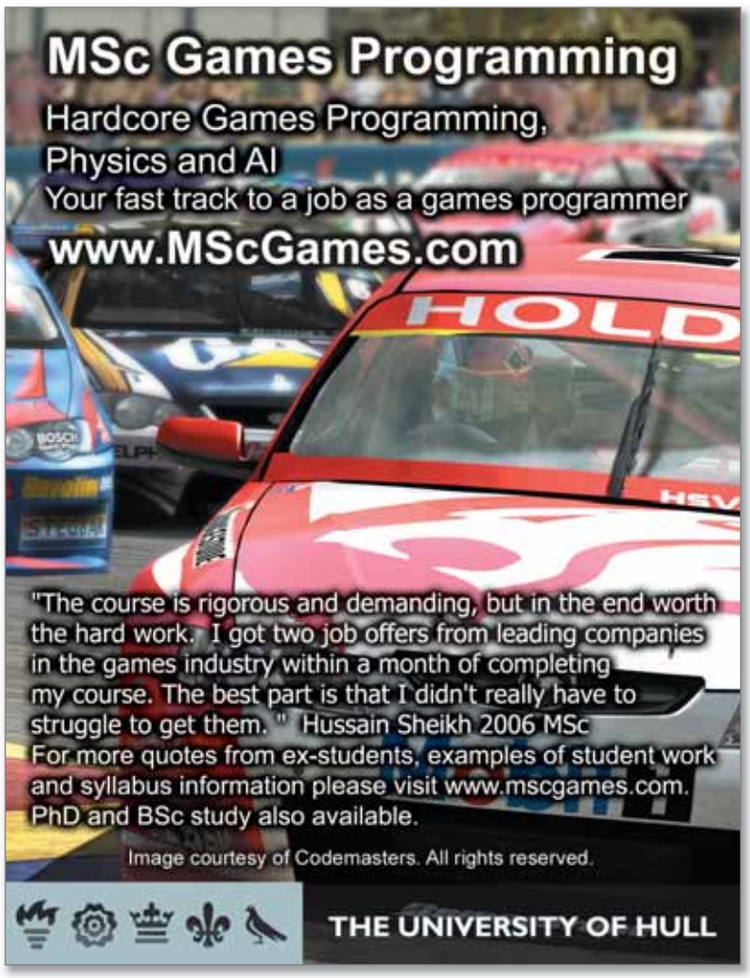
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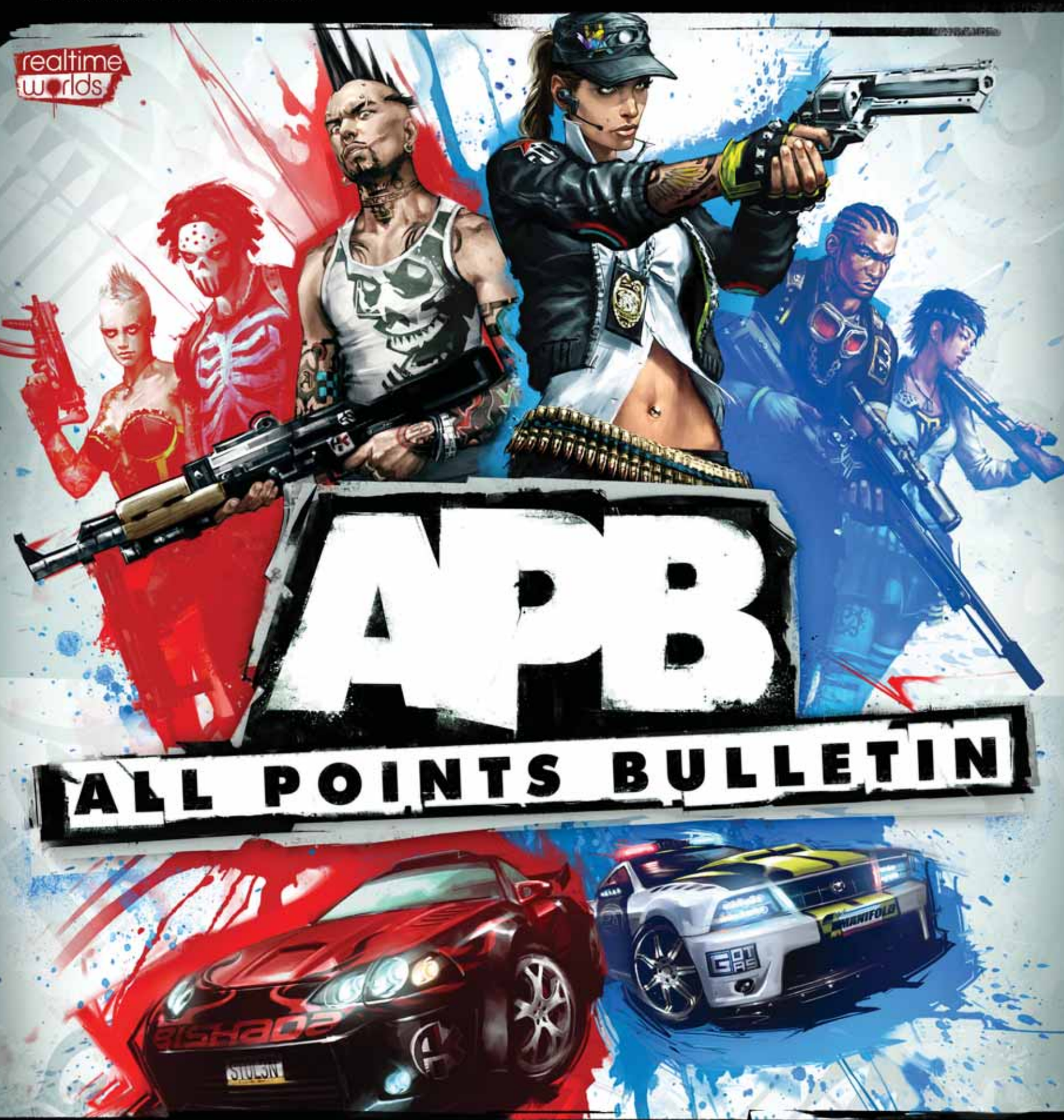

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